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A man with a mission
Mandela speaks to Ibrahim Nafie 6



Clampdown

ALGERIAN security forces killed 53 armed Islamic militants in a major operation still under way in the Sidi Youssef highlands near Sidi Bel-Abbes, west of Algiers, and the Baraki and Semmar suburbs of the capital, the daily *El-Khabar* said in a report carried by AFP.

In another development, the Algerian interior ministry on Tuesday imposed new restrictions on Abassi Madani, the leader of the Islamic Salvation Front, following the latter's appeal to UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan to initiate talks on Algeria's crisis.

UN spokesman Fred Eckhard denied reports that Annan said that the Algerian unrest could no longer be regarded as an internal affair. But the spokesman confirmed that Annan wants to see an end to bloodshed in Algeria. *(see p.5)*

New shooting

TWO ISRAELI men were killed by unidentified assailants in a drive-by shooting that took place yesterday west of Jerusalem, a police spokesman reported. According to the AP, the shooting occurred near the town of Nataf inside Israel but along the Green line marking the boundary of the West Bank.

Israeli radio stated the assailants apparently were Palestinian militants but a *police statement said it* was not clear yet whether the attackers were militants or criminals. The latest shooting comes just over a month after two suicide bombers blew themselves up in a Jerusalem market and killed 13 Israelis.

Eban speaks

ABBA Eban, Israel's former foreign minister and its diplomatic voice to the world for decades, criticised right-wing Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu's policies on peace in the Middle East. In an interview with Reuter yesterday, he said that Netanyahu was addicted to power and was leading an increasingly radicalised population.

Eban said that the concept of a greater Israel that would include the West Bank was a fallacy. In exchange for peace, he said that Israel should accept the Palestinians' right for self-determination and the creation of a Palestinian state, return the Golan Heights to Syria and withdraw from Lebanon.

Press ban

PROSECUTOR-General Ragaa El-Arabi ordered Tuesday a ban on the publication of any details related to the libel suit filed by Interior Minister Hassan El-Alfy against the *Al-Shaab* newspaper, the bi-weekly mouthpiece of the *Islamist-oriented Labour* Party.

Editor-in-chief Magdy Ahmed Hussein, has been leading a fierce campaign against the Interior Minister over the past month, accusing him of corruption and misuse of his post to increase his wealth. Alfy sued Hussein and five other reporters at *Al-Shaab*, accusing them of libel and slander.

Security sources told *Al-Ahram Weekly* that the prosecutor's office is expected to press charges soon against *Al-Shaab*'s reporters.

INSIDE

Commentary

Coming to grips with reality

As Madeleine Albright prepares for her first trip to the Middle East, very few expect that she will be able to achieve a breakthrough

After seven months on the job, US Secretary of *State Madeleine Albright* embarks on Tuesday on her first trip to the Middle East, becoming involved personally for the first time in efforts to revive the faltering peace process. Described by Administration officials as a realist, Albright's expectations about what can be achieved in one trip were said to be realistic too. "The problems between the parties are complex. They are deeply entrenched and they will not be solved in one trip," a US official told *Al-Ahram Weekly*. The same sentiment was echoed in the countries Albright plans to visit — Israel, the Palestinian territories, Egypt, Jordan, Syria and Saudi Arabia.

In advance of Albright's visit, American mediator Dennis Ross was consulting on political issues with *Israeli and Palestinian* negotiators in Washington after making progress, during his last visit to the region, in reviving bilateral security cooperation. Ross was meeting with the Israelis yesterday, and with the Palestinians today. The Administration official said Albright would try to find a way "to marry the idea of accelerating the permanent status negotiations with the aspects of the Oslo process that have not been completed."

US officials said the new American strategy is to face the reality that "the peace process, Oslo style, has collapsed". "The step-by-step approach has died away and pursuing it is no longer possible," an official said. Consequently, the new strategy that Albright will propose is to convince the Palestinians and Israelis to address the major issues that have been deferred until the final status negotiations.

According to an Arab diplomat, Albright's plan is to confront the Israelis and the Palestinians with the "real choices" that have to be made in the final status talks. Whether this will be acceptable to the Palestinians is an open question.

A Palestinian official in Washington told the *Weekly* that Yasser Arafat, in a message to Albright, insisted that the Israeli government carry out the West Bank redeployment and "implement other steps according to the Oslo timetable". Arafat, however, said the implementation of these steps could run parallel to the final status negotiations.

The Palestinians also insist that Israel halt the construction of new Jewish settlements on Palestinian soil. Under the US proposal, according to diplomatic sources, Israel will be asked to "restrict" the expansion of settlements but will not be required to freeze construction completely.

Israel, for its part, is placing the onus on security. Netanyahu said on Tuesday the fresh American effort would fail unless Arafat cracked down on Islamist militants. "If the Palestinian Authority continues to refuse to fight the infrastructure of the terrorist organisations, our peace efforts won't go very far," Netanyahu said. "Indeed, I would say that the entire peace process would be endangered."

"Mrs Albright made it very clear. She expects full compliance with promises given by the Palestinian Authority and Mr Arafat to fight the terrorists and so do we," Netanyahu told reporters. Terrorism is high on Albright's agenda, not only in connection with Israel's security, but also to promote security for American forces stationed in the Gulf.

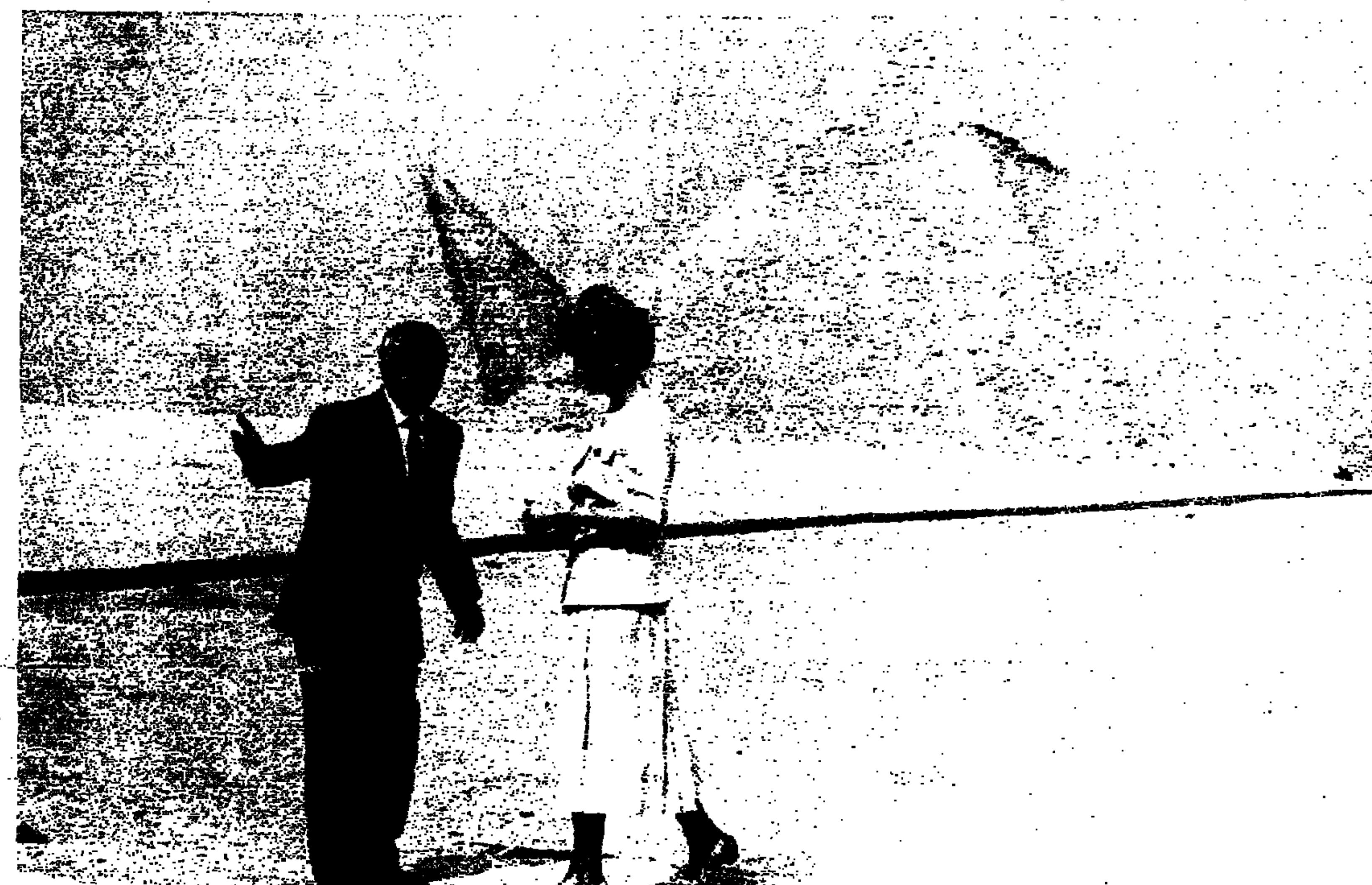
In Riyadh, Albright will try to convince the Saudi Arabian leadership to attend the Middle East/North Africa economic summit scheduled for November in Qatar. "This will be an uphill struggle," an Arab diplomat said.

Foreign Minister Amr Moussa said in Cairo that he was going to talk to Albright "about all the major issues related to the peace process and the major crises and setbacks that befell this process." The mood in Cairo is that a slight improvement may be expected, but no breakthrough. Cairo will press first for lifting the blockade which Israel imposed on the Palestinian territories following the 30 July suicide bombings in West Jerusalem that killed 13 Israelis. Another target for Cairo is to get Netanyahu to stop the construction of settlements in Palestinian territories, particularly in East Jerusalem.

Albright's visit comes against a background of severe tension in Arab-Israeli relations. Israel was angered by an Egyptian court's decision to send Azam Azam to jail for 15 years after convicting him of spying.

The Arabs, particularly Cairo and Damascus, were upset by the announcement that Turkey and Israel would stage naval manoeuvres in the Mediterranean, with US participation, in November. Moussa described the exercise as a "negative message, a negative step."

***Hoda Tewfik** in Washington,*
***Dina Ezzat** in Cairo*



Diana, Princess of Wales, visiting Egypt in May 1992 *(see special p.7)*

Football's coming home to Cairo

THE FOURTH FIFA-JVC Under-17 World Championship kicks off this evening at Cairo Stadium, with the opening match in Group A between Egypt and Thailand. Other matches will be played in Alexandria, Port Said and Ismailia, with the final taking place in Cairo on 21 September.

Defending champions Ghana, together with the world's third-ranked team, Brazil, are expected to dominate the tournament. Although not a major force in international soccer, Egypt has high hopes for its youngsters, after their unexpected victory in the recent U-17 African Nations Cup last May.

"*Winning* is the only ambition we have and reaching the final is our goal," said Mohamed Ali, the Egyptian manager. "The games will not be easy for any of the teams. There is no strong group and no easy group, because these are the best 16 teams in the world."

Brazil, however, may have that extra edge thanks to the overwhelming support they can expect *from the Egyptian fans who adore them* more than any other team — save for their own.

Egypt has been holding intensive training camps over the last two years for talented fourteen-year-olds, and the efforts finally bore fruit at the African championships in Botswana. Egypt set up an air-tight defence to secure victory in the final over Mali by a single goal.

Egypt's organisational abilities will also be on display over the next eighteen days. "By the end of this competition, we hope to be able to say that we have proven our ability to host the 2006 World Cup," said Samir Zaher, head of the Egyptian Football Association.

A full rehearsal for the opening ceremony was held on Tuesday evening at the Cairo Stadium, with Prime Minister Kamal El-Ganzouri and Information Minister Safwat El-Sherif in attendance.

(see U-17 World Championship special pp. 16 & 17)

Tragedy hits home

In Alexandria, **Hala Halim** finds a city that has taken the Al-Fayeds to its heart

"At about 10.30 am on Sunday I was on the beach [in Bianchi, Agami] and everyone, but everyone, was talking about it — the beach boys playing racket... even the Bedouins came to me and said have you heard the news, *khawaga*?" said one Alexandrian of Greek origin.

Until very recently, the Al-Fayed family was largely unknown to the vast majority of Alexandrians. However, as their fame grew in the international business community, news of their success began to trickle back to their home town. As the sporadic investigations, journalistic or otherwise, into the background of the Al-Fayeds and the origin of their wealth reached a crescendo in the past month with the romance between Princess Diana and Emad Al-Fayed, the family became the talk of the town.

While the punters buying papers at Ramleh Station were muttering about foul play in the car accident in which the couple lost their lives, "Dodi's" childhood friends and classmates in Agami were mourning "a very loveable friend". After the divorce of his parents Mohamed Al-Fayed and *Samira Khashoggi, Emad* remained in Alexandria in the care of his paternal uncle Salah. Living at Salah Al-Fayed's mansion in Victoria, Ramleh, Emad attended Collège St Marc, a French school noted for its strict discipline and emphasis on academic excellence. He joined the school in 1961 and graduated in '71, according to Frère Georges, the present principal.

Among Emad's closest friends in Alexandria were the Sakakini siblings, members of the elite of the *ancien régime* whose father was a friend of Salah Al-Fayed. André, who was also at St Marc, and Aline Sakakini, who went to the Besançon, both remember Emad as a kind and gentle friend. "Dodi was very pleasant and extremely well-bred", remembers Aline, "he had manners such as I have rarely seen. And he was timid; he would blush when you spoke to him. He adored his uncle Salah who was looking after him." On certain weekdays, adds Aline, Emad would wake up very early and call by with his chauffeur to pick up the Sakakinis from their home in Sporting neighbourhood so he could give them a ride to school.

From early on, it would appear, Emad had an air of glamour about him. During the weekends, the friends would meet up at either the Alexandria Sporting Club or the Yacht Club where Emad, who had a speedboat and a zodiac, taught Aline and André waterskiing. "Dodi was a bit eccentric in the way he dressed", says Aline, "he was always tip top, dressed in the latest fashion but for us here [in the late sixties], it was very eccentric." And neither Aline nor André, now a professional show-jumper based in Hamburg, has forgotten his collection of pet animals which ranged from parrots to a caged monkey.

Salah, Emad and Mohamed Al-Fayed

At St Marc, adds André, Emad was a good pupil, but not outstanding. It is an evaluation with which Mahmoud Zaki, who taught him Arabic for two years, agrees: "he was among the good students. One of his assets was that he had a photographic memory, and he was quiet, very polite and modest". At the behest of Salah Al-Fayed, Zaki also gave Emad private Arabic lessons twice a week, "not because his Arabic was bad, but because his uncle was very keen that Emad should master all the subtleties of the language." On Zaki's first visit to the house in Victoria, which he describes as "palatial", he found Emad waiting for him outside the gates with two bottles of milk in his hands. The mystery was solved when they entered the garden and Zaki saw two huge dogs coming towards them. Emad, patting the dogs, asked his teacher to pour the milk for them so that the next time he called they would recognise *him as a friend*.

After taking his *idadia* (preparatory school) certificate, Emad left for Switzerland where he attended Le Rosey school. André Sakakini who saw him off at the airport says that "Dodi knew that his future was in Europe, because of his father". Since then, Alexandrian friends have seen him on and off. Sometimes it was at the Fayed's Agami villa on Champs Elysee Street in Bianchi beach, but more often the reunions were in Europe, as his visits home dwindled. "I hadn't seen Dodi for several years", says André. "Only last week I was in California and I met with another friend from school days, and we were saying let's get together with Dodi — and then this terrible news. I haven't been able to think of anything else since I heard about the accident."

On Sunday evening, as a group of cosmopolitan Alexandrians struggled to come to terms with the news, they shrugged off the conspiracy theories, preferring comparisons with Greek tragedy. One lady thought Diana's death would have the same long-lasting impact as Kennedy's assassination. All felt extremely *sorry for Mohamed* Al-Fayed whose plight reminded them of Onassis' when his son died in a plane accident. In the following days, they would take issue with the fact that Emad's death has elicited a mere fraction of the media coverage accorded Diana's. The Al-Fayeds have now become part of the collective mem*ory of the city*.

"Poor Dodi, he's hardly mentioned; all the focus is on Diana. And he was buried *sukkeiti* [without much ado]", says one society lady who often visited Salah Al-Fayed and his Italian wife at their Victoria mansion and remembers Emad as a young boy. "I saw Diana once when I was in London and was staying with a *friend* at the Albert Hall Mansions opposite Kensington Gardens", she adds. "I was walking in the street and all of a sudden there was Diana. Charles was a few steps behind her. I waved and she smiled and waved back. She was so beautiful. When I heard the news, I cried and cried as if she was my sister".

World parliamentarians to meet in Cairo

Parliamentarians from around the world will gather in Cairo next week to debate a variety of political and human rights issues. **Gamal Essam El-Din** sets the scene

As many as 1,500 representatives from 138 parliaments around the world will gather in Cairo next week for the 98th conference of the International Parliamentary Union (IPU). President Hosni Mubarak is expected to address the opening session of the conference, which will be held at the Cairo International Conference Centre in Nasr City from 11 to 15 September.

The IPU was established in 1889 to strengthen cooperation and promote understanding between the world's parliaments. The agenda of the Cairo conference includes a wide variety of issues related to the exercise of democracy and respect for human rights, including parliamentary elections, the role of political parties and special interest groups as well as interaction between politics and the media.

The IPU members will be required to elect a new president and vice-president in the first plenary sitting. The non-renewable, two-year term of current IPU President Ahmed Fathi Sorour, Speaker of Egypt's People's Assembly, expires in the middle of this month. P. A. Sangma, speaker of India's House of the People, is widely expected to be the next IPU president. But he faces two rival candidates: Eduardo Menem, president of the Senate of Argentina and brother of Argentina's president Carlos Menem, and Miguel Angel Martinez, a Spanish parliamentarian of international renown.

Two days before the opening of the conference, the IPU's Arab group will meet to coordinate its position on the issues on the agenda and also on the election of the IPU president. The Arab group is also expected to press the IPU to grant full membership to the Palestinian National Council [PNC]. The PNC gained provisional membership during an IPU conference held last April in South Korea.

Several Arab states are seeking the inclusion of a number of thorny issues in the agenda. Iraq has requested a debate on "the responsibility of the United Nations for safeguarding its unity and sovereignty," while Kuwait has asked for a debate on "the necessity for keeping the world in general, and the Middle East in particular, free from nuclear and other weapons of mass-destruction."

Lebanon, for its part, has requested "support for its continuing efforts to implement UN Security Council Resolution 425 (of March 1978) on the withdrawal of Israeli forces from southern Lebanon," while Libya has called for a debate on "the need to lift the air embargo and other measures imposed on the Libyan Arab Jamahiriyeh [Republic]."

Iran has requested discussion of "the need for worldwide pressure to halt all Jewish settlement activities in the holy city of Jerusalem and other Palestinian occupied territories."

Egypt will submit to the conference a memo on the latest developments in Middle East peace-making, strongly criticising the policies of Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu. The memo takes to task the Israeli Knesset, which is a member of the IPU, for supporting Netanyahu's policies and endorsing large budgetary allocations for the construction of Israeli settlements on Palestinian soil.

"As part of its anti-peace drive, the Israeli Knesset has passed a number of rulings that officially annex the Arab holy city of Jerusalem as the unified and eternal capital of Israel," the Egyptian memo says. "On 23 July, the Knesset also approved, in a first reading, new legislation that makes the return of the Golan Heights to Syria conditional on the approval of 80 members out of a total of 120."

The Egyptian memo also says that the United States, despite being the main peace broker in the Middle East, was giving full support to Israel's anti-peace policies, recalling that Washington has used its veto power more than once in the UN Security Council to block resolutions condemning Israeli settlement policies. The memo also describes as "entirely unwise" legislation passed by the US Congress on moving the US Embassy in Israel from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem.

Some Egyptian opposition parties are expected to use the conference as a forum for airing their grievances. A "defence of democracy committee", including leaders of opposition parties, human rights groups and intellectuals, decided at a recent meeting to prepare a report on what it calls "wide-scale rigging of parliamentary elections". The report refers to rulings by the Court of Cassation and administrative courts that invalidated the membership of a large number of deputies, officially declared winners in the 1995 elections.

But a source at the ruling National Democratic Party [NDP] said the report will not be submitted to the IPU conference. "It is an unacceptable invitation for foreign intervention in our internal affairs," the source said. "It is deplorable that the idea was floated at a time Egypt is enjoying a high level of democracy."

Instead, an Egyptian memo will be presented to the conference on "ensuring lasting democracy by forging close links between parliament and the people."

Other socio-economic issues on the conference's agenda range from investment in Third World countries to child labour, unemployment and environmental protection.

Alliance controversy surfaces again


Bassiouni El-Kholi

As two pro-normalisation writers wait to be questioned by the Press Syndicate, their associate is pushing for the establishment of an Egyptian peace group. **Dina Ezzat** reports

Two Egyptian writers, *Lutfi El-Kholi* and Abdel-Moneim Said, who issued the Copenhagen Declaration at the beginning of this year with Israeli, Arab and European intellectuals, are to be questioned by the Press Syndicate's council for violating a Syndicate resolution that bars the normalisation of relations with Israel. The gathering that took place in the Danish capital forged an International Alliance for Arab-Israeli Peace.

In the meantime, one of their associates, Salah Bassiouni, chairman of Bassiouni Law Firm and a former diplomat, is pushing for the establishment of a non-governmental organisation to serve the cause of Arab-Israeli peace. "What we did is not normalisation," argued Said, who heads the Al-Ahram Centre for Political and Strategic Studies. "It was a legitimate political dialogue aiming at boosting the chances of peace."

Said and El-Kholi, a respected political analyst, responded to the syndicate's decision with a legal memorandum to explain their position. "We did not break any law, neither the law of the syndicate nor any other law," Said explained.

So far, the syndicate has not responded to their memorandum. Said commented: "We are giving it a few weeks before we undertake serious legal action, because we cannot have such an accusation hanging over our heads." The two men could decide to file a libel lawsuit against the Syndicate.

For his part, Bassiouni told *Al-Ahram Weekly* that he was working to establish a strictly Egyptian NGO "that will be joined by a sizeable group of people who expressed interest in doing something to support the cause of peace between Arabs and Israelis." Bassiouni denied the reports that he had any intention of establishing a joint Israeli-Egyptian NGO. "This was a misunderstanding," he said. Bassiouni noted that there are "at least 20 peace groups" in Israel and added: "It seems only reasonable to help mobilise the peace forces in this country."

Bassiouni, in cooperation with Ali El-Shalaqani, another lawyer, and in accordance with Egyptian law, is going to file a request with the Ministry of Social Affairs for the establishment of the NGO "with private funding by its members".

According to Bassiouni, the founders are over 70 men and women from all walks of life — intellectuals, professionals and students. The NGO "will promote the cause of a just and comprehensive peace by holding seminars, putting out bulletins" and promoting contact between peace groups in Egypt and Israel, he said. "Peace is a final and irreversible option for the countries of the Middle East," Bassiouni stated. "Therefore, we need to support the cause of peace."

El-Sayed Said, vice-chairman of the Al-Ahram Centre, showed his solidarity with El-Kholi and Abdel-Moneim Said by publishing an article in *Al-Ahram* last week in which he charged that the syndicate was turning into a "court of inquisition".

Although he opposes the Copenhagen Declaration, El-Sayed Said believes that "it is unacceptable that the syndicate would penalise them [El-Kholi and Abdel-Moneim Said] instead of holding a dialogue with them. If all political issues become taboo, then freedom of expression will face a serious threat," he wrote. If the Press Syndicate expects all its members to adopt identical positions, it will be turning them into a herd of sheep, El-Sayed Said added.

Responding to his article, Galal Aref wrote in *Al-Arabi*, the mouthpiece of the Nasserist Party, that the resolutions of the Syndicate's general assembly are binding on all its members. Aref added that syndicate members, in their bid to oppose normalisation with Israel, were "acting as the conscience of the nation and not like a herd of sheep."

Despite the ongoing controversy, the Peace Alliance is going ahead with its agenda. An international board, made up of 10 to *12 intellectuals* from *Egypt, Jordan*, the Palestinian territories, Israel, as well as other countries, is currently being formed. Four committees will be established to follow up on peace-related issues. These committees will focus on the implementation of the peace agreements, the issue of settlements, violence against civilians and weapons of mass destruction.

Each committee will include members from the four member states of the alliance and one member from a European country. Abdel-Moneim Said will chair the settlements' committee. Tayassir Abdel-Gaber, from Jordan, will chair the mass destruction committee. The settlement committee will be headed by a Palestinian, Riyad Malki. Meanwhile, the violence against civilian committee will be headed by David Kamehi, a former Israeli intelligence official. Kamehi's association with the alliance was one of the main reasons that prompted many to suspect the motives behind the alliance. Asked about the criterion for the selection of heads of committees, Said answered that it was a matter of each choosing the area in which he was most interested.

Moreover, the alliance is preparing to hold an international conference on peace in the Middle East, either in Israel or the Palestinian self-rule areas. The conference will be divided into a number of seminars and workshops on peace-related issues. Participating will be a host of political and intellectual figures. The conference should end with a march to the Knesset (the Israeli parliament) and possibly Arab landmarks in Jerusalem. This conference was scheduled to be held in August but "due to the current situation it was difficult to hold it", lamented Said.

The Egyptian intellectuals who joined the alliance were widely criticised for breaking the intellectual front aimed at steering clear of all forms of normalisation with Israel. They were also blamed for signing the Copenhagen Declaration which many critics say undermined Arab rights.

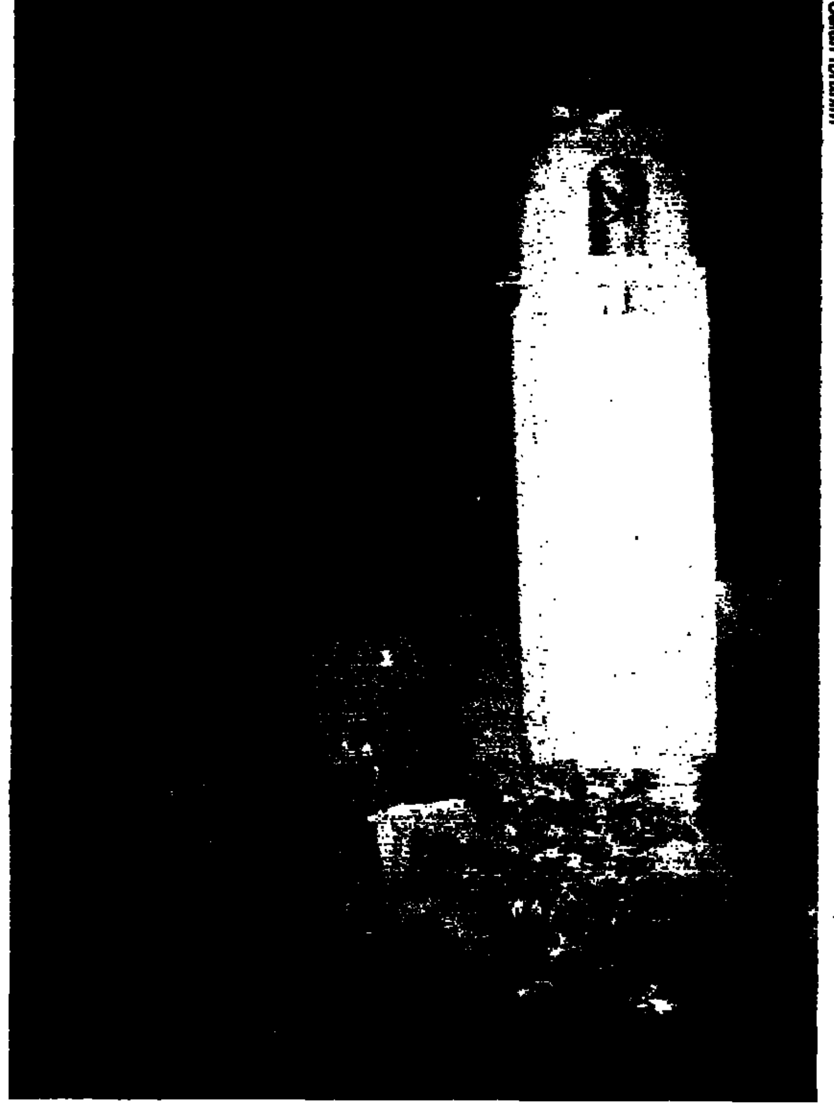


photo: Salah Ibrahim

The reported appearance of the Virgin Mary in a little-known Nile Delta village is attracting large numbers of Coptic visitors but, as **Sherine Nasr** finds out, some observers spotted nothing unusual

Copts gather as word circulated that images of the Virgin Mary appear at the top of the tower of a local church in Shentena EL-Hagar village in Menoufiya

Our Lady of Shentena El-Hagar

Four weeks ago, few people had ever heard of Shentena El-Hagar, an obscure village in Menoufiya Governorate, 70 kilometres north of Cairo. But now large numbers of enthusiastic Copts are flocking to the village after word circulated that *images of the Virgin Mary appear at night at the* top of the tower of a local church named after her. The reported appearances coincided with a fast, dedicated to the Virgin, which Copts observe between 7 August and Assumption on 22 August.

Father You'annas, the local priest, said that he was told by a group of young people who live in front of the church that they saw large white doves flying around the church steeple which was mysteriously flooded by light. *This occurred between 1* and 3am on 7 August, he said.

"Although I thought it was their imagination, I encouraged them to carry on observing the unusual phenomena and keep me informed," the priest said.

When the same thing happened the following night, Father You'annas decided to join the observers on the roof of a guest hall next to the church. "We were singing the praises of the Virgin when suddenly at 1am, a glowing silver-coloured dove-like image flew from the steeple towards us. Another one did the same thing, but it flew even closer to our heads. This was the first time I had ever seen anything like that," he said.

Similar scenes recurred on the following nights. Lights would glow on the iron cross on top of the church tower, then fade.

"It was on the 16th of August, five days before the end of the fasting period, that the silver lights that glowed on the cross took the shape of the Virgin Mary, with her long white dress and grey head-cover. Though faint, the shape was clear to every one," the priest said.

Since then, crowds of Copts have been flocking to Shentena El-Hagar, inhabited by some 120 Coptic families. "In less than 15 days, the church was visited by nearly 200,000 people from all over the country," said Bishop Benyamin, in whose diocese the church is located.

However, five security men guarding the church said they saw nothing unusual. "I have been serving here for a long time, and I'm on duty for 24 hours. But so far, I have not seen anything supernatural," said El-Sayed Saqr, one of the security men.

But Atef Hamdi, a Muslim carpenter who lives next to the church, said the Virgin's appearance was spotted by his four-year-old son. "When the news spread, I invited all my Coptic friends to come and watch from my roof," Hamdi said. "On the eve of the 21st, my Coptic friends and my son Karim were able to see the Virgin, but I could only see a glowing light in the same spot."

Karim, asked about what he saw, answered shyly: "I saw a veiled woman up on the minaret [meaning the steeple]." Pointing at a picture of the Virgin inside the church, he added: "This is how she looked."

Pope Shenouda III, head of the Coptic Orthodox Church, has established a committee of five bishops to investigate the matter and submit a report to him. "I arrived together with Bishop Bishoi on the eve of the 20th," said Bishop Benyamin. "We both watched the appearance of the Virgin Mary which lasted from 4.30 to 5.10am. The Virgin was bending before the cross, with her hands clasped. Then she turned towards the audience, blessed them *with her outstretched arms. Her head-cover of grey* light was hovering in the air."

The appearance was accompanied by the smell of incense that filled the air, witnesses said. Others said a strong light came out of an icon of the Virgin and filled the inside of the church while a group of monks were praying there.

"At first, I simply could not believe it," said Malak Saad, a church attendant. "I was even skeptical when Father You'*annas ordered us to stay up* all night watching the tower. But it was only on the 16th that I saw a glowing dove, with wings as big as those of an eagle, flying around the cross."

Visitors usually come in the evening, spend the night watching and praying, and leave in the morning. At night, lights are turned off in anticipation, and hymns praising the Virgin are chanted. The narrow alley in which the church is located becomes so crowded with people that many cannot enter the church to pray.

On one occasion, the crowd was so large that a roof of one of the church rooms, on which 50 people stood, collapsed, but no one was injured.

The Virgin's reported appearance has changed the lifestyle of the sleepy village. "The micro-bus fare, which used to be 25 piastres, has jumped to LE2 and sales at the village's modest shops are booming," said Sobhi Saad, who has lived in the village for 30 years.

Villagers living near the church seized the opportunity to increase their income by selling snacks, tea and refreshments to the visitors. Others are renting the roofs of their houses for LE5 per night.

To ensure security, the government has assigned additional policemen to guard the church and the crowds.

The Virgin Mary has reportedly made two appearances in Cairo in the past. The first, and the most famous, was in April 1968 when her apparition was observed repeatedly and confirmed by a committee of bishops at a church in Zeitoun in north-eastern Cairo. The second was in 1986, at a church in Shubra in northern Cairo.

Al-Azhar angered by Turkish decision

Reports that the Turkish government will no longer recognise degrees granted by *Al-Azhar University have drawn an* angry reaction from both religious leaders and politicians in Egypt. **Gamal Essam El-Din** reports

Reports that the Turkish government will no longer recognise degrees awarded by Egypt's Al-Azhar University met with an angry reaction in Cairo, where educationalists and politicians described the decision as unfair, unwarranted and anti-Islamic. The decision was taken last week by the Turkish Higher Education Council, according to Turkey's English-language newspaper, the *Daily News*. The Council is said to have accused Al-Azhar's Turkish graduates of promoting Islamic extremism and attacking Kamal Ataturk, founder of the modern secular Turkish state. A spokesman for the Council was also quoted by Reuters as saying that Al-Azhar's curricula fell below the required educational standards.

As many as 2,000 Turkish students who had graduated from Al-Azhar in the faculties of medicine, engineering, pharmacology, law, economics and Islamic *Shari'a*, have come forward to protest the decision, accusing the Council of double standards.

Meanwhile, the teaching staff at Al-Azhar were taken aback by the news. The decision is all the more difficult to understand, coming as it does at a time when the university is under pressure to increase the number of its missions serving Islamic communities in Africa, Asia, Europe, America and Australia. Al-Azhar has more than 75 educational missions in different countries and awards around 250 scholarships each year to foreign Muslim students.

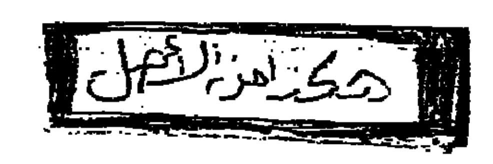
Ahmed Omar Hashem, the president of Al-Azhar University, strongly objected to the Turkish decision, pointing out that the university's curricula were based on a moderate and enlightened interpretation of Islam. Addressing a news conference, Hashem said the Turkish claim that Al-Azhar was fanning the flames of extremism was an "insult to all Muslims on earth."

He pointed out that there are over *170,000 students enrolled* at Al-Azhar, which also has cooperation and exchange programmes with a large number of Western universities, attesting to its leading role in disseminating moderate Islam "without deviation either to the left or to the right." Hashem urged the Turkish authorities to reconsider their decision which, he said, "gave a distorted impression of Al-Azhar's role in promoting Islamic culture."

Mahmoud El-Farran, deputy chairman of parliament's religious affairs committee, characterised the Turkish decision as "very stupid", saying it "reflected a state of schizophrenia" in that country. Turkey was once the leader of the Islamic world, El-Farran said: "The people who took this decision are a group of secularists who are determined to destroy Turkey's exceptional contribution to Islam and to suppress the growing Islamic trend in Turkey... These secularists are opposed to all religions, so it is natural that they are opposed to Al-Azhar as well, because of its role in promoting not just Islamic culture and religious values, but also tolerance and enlightenment."

Hassan Radwan, deputy chairman of parliament's education committee, said Al-Azhar should concentrate on raising the standard of its curricula, "in order to provide Islamic answers to modern problems." *Although he conceded that Al-Azhar's curricula* had been criticised by the committee in the past, Radwan said: "We never accused the cursus of promoting Islamic extremism and militancy. On the contrary, it is Al-Azhar's role in spreading enlightened views that has made it a target for Islamist militants. That is why the government should allocate more funds to this venerable institution which has a vital role to play in fighting extremism and promoting an enlightened view of Islam."

Radwan added that he was not surprised by the Turkish decision because it came at a time when Turkey "was distancing itself from Arab and Muslim countries and inching closer to Israel."





Lawsuits against Netanyahu and CNN thrown out

This was not a lucky week for lawyer Mustafa Ashoub. He lost two lawsuits demanding billions of dollars in compensation from Prime Minister Netanyahu and Cable News Network

On Monday, Cairo's southern court threw out a lawsuit filed by lawyer Mustafa Ashoub against Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu for his responsibility in the distribution of posters insulting Islam in the West Bank. Ashoub demanded a compensation of $10 billion to be spent on the construction of mosques and churches and helping the families of the Palestinian Intifada martyrs.

The court rejected the lawsuit on the grounds that the claimant had "no direct and personal interest" sanctioned by law.

Ashoub had based his case on *Article 163 of* the Civil Code, which stipulates that anyone who causes harm to another should pay him compensation. Ashoub argued that the acts of desecration inflicted "definite harm" on both Muslims and Christians.

The posters, distributed by Tatyana Suskind, an Israeli settler, depicted the Prophet Mohamed as a pig, with a hoof writing in an open book labeled as the Qur'an. In another drawing, the Virgin Mary was portrayed with the head of a cow.

In rejecting Ashoub's case, the court stated that no harm had been inflicted on him directly. The court argued that harm was inflicted on all Muslim and Christian nations and that the only people entitled to demand compensation are their religious leaders or their representatives. The court, however, denounced the Israeli acts of desecration.

Ashoub vowed to appeal. Although he was obviously disappointed, he seemed to take comfort in the fact that the Israeli acts of desecration were condemned by the court. For him, the lawsuit was a way of giving vent to his anger and frustration. Even had he won, there would have been no way the Egyptian court's decision could have been enforced in Israel.

"The lawsuit was meant to send a strong message to the Israelis that Egyptians should not be taken lightly," Ashoub said after the court handed down its decision. "As a Muslim and Egyptian, I feel I have the right to say 'no' to any Israeli act that humiliates Islam."

In a previous court sitting, Ashoub recounted how he had "felt deeply humiliated to see the Prophet Mohamed depicted as a pig and also when, two days later, five copies of the Quran were torn to pieces in a Hebron school. I was similarly hurt to see the Virgin Mary depicted with the head of a cow. And what hurt me most is that Tatyana was finally set free."

During the court hearings, people expressed sympathy with Ashoub and hope that he would win. "I believe that the case is significant in the sense that it shows that there is a public reaction," a lawyer attending the hearings said.

Some members of the public who attended the court's final sitting said they were disappointed by the decision. "Since I filed the lawsuit, there has been no Israeli reaction, except for one interview I had with an Israeli journalist," Ashoub said. "And yet, I believe that this case, although it was rejected, has sent a message to the Israelis that Egyptians are angry and frustrated at their behaviour."

Reported by ***Gihan Shahine***

Lawyer *Mustafa Ashoub* has vowed to appeal the decision of Cairo's southern court of first instance which threw out on Saturday the $500 million lawsuit that he had brought against Cable News Network (CNN). Ashoub had accused CNN of damaging Egypt's reputation by airing footage of a barber performing female genital mutilation on a young girl three years ago. "I was quite surprised by this decision, which I consider unfair," Ashoub told *Al-Ahram Weekly*.

Ashoub initiated the legal action in September 1994 "on behalf of the Egyptian people," *demanding $250 million in compensation.* Presumably sensing that his case was not strong enough, Ashoub later persuaded the girl's father, Fathi Hamza, to join the lawsuit and demand an equal amount of $250 million.

In rejecting the case, Judge Ala'a Abbas said Ashoub had no legal standing to bring the action against CNN. Although the court formally accepted Hamza as a claimant, it rejected his demand for compensation because the filming "was done with his approval."

"How can they tell me, after three years, that I have no legal standing? Why didn't they say so from the very beginning?" Ashoub asked.

At the home of the Hamza family, the reaction was different. The loud beat of Egyptian pop music could be heard clearly from outside the small apartment, located only metres away from the court's headquarters. Inside, Nagla'a, the girl on whom the operation was performed, was swaying with the music. "Frankly, I couldn't care less about the court's decision; it never mattered to me," Nagla'a, now 14, said. "All that I wanted was for this fuss to end, so that I could pursue my life normally."

But the father was obviously disappointed. "I had such high hopes but that [the court's decision] will not stop me. I will pursue this battle to the very end," Hamza, 62, said.

Sipping tea and puffing at a cigarette, Hamza sighed: "This is my last cigarette and I don't have money to buy more." With a monthly pension of LE488, Hamza has to support his six-member family. One of them, an older daughter named Heba, suffers from a mental illness that requires expensive medication. "CNN gained fame, the press wrote about us but I got nothing in the end," he complained.

CNN aired the film three years ago as part of its coverage of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD), held in Cairo in September 1994. The film showed the barber cutting away at the girl's genitals, despite her hysterical screams.

The barber, the father and Nevine Yehia, the Egyptian reporter who organised the shoot, were arrested afterwards but later released.

The film triggered the anger of Egyptian human and women's rights groups who subsequently launched campaigns for the prohibition of the practice of female circumcision. A counter-campaign was launched by Islamic cleric Youssef El-Badri, who recently won a court order quashing a ministerial decree banning the practice in both public and private hospitals and clinics.

Reported by ***Amira Howeidy***

Azam's conviction angers Israel

The sentencing of Israeli spy Azam Azam to 15 years hard labour outraged Binyamin Netanyahu who said he would not rest until President Mubarak agreed to release him. Khaled Dawoud reports


photo: Khaled El-Fiqi

Asaad Al-Asaad, adviser to Netanyahu, talks to reporters after the trial ended

The atmosphere at the final session of the high-profile trial of three Israeli nationals and an Egyptian accused of spying for the Israeli intelligence service, the Mossad, was extremely tense. Heavily armed policemen filled the large courtroom for the hearing held on Sunday.

Hundreds of anti-riot Central Security Forces in full riot gear were positioned inside and outside the Bab El-Khalq court in the heart of Fatimid Cairo.

Dozens of policemen surrounded the iron cage where the two main defendants, Azam Azam, a 34-year-old Israeli of Druze origin, and Emad Ismail, a 24-year-old Egyptian, stood in their white prison uniforms. More than 100 Egyptian, Israeli and foreign reporters, who had packed the courtroom since the early morning, were forced to sit on the other side of the chamber to prevent access to Azam and Ismail. The other defendants, two Israeli-Druze women, Zahra Youssef Greis and Mona Ahmed Shawahneh, were tried in absentia.

Azam and Ismail looked worried when Supreme State Security Court Judge Moharam Darwish walked in at noon, after hours of waiting, to announce the verdict and the sentences. Azam tried to look cheerful, talking to his family and exchanging quick smiles with Israeli Embassy diplomats. Ismail was clearly more nervous, lighting one cigarette after another. Our reporter used sign language to ask Ismail how he felt. He pointed upwards to the sky, indicating that he only had faith in God.

Before announcing the sentences Darwish read out a short statement, affirming that the court had carefully studied the case and would hand down the sentences "with a clear conscience." Ismail and the two Israeli women were sentenced to life imprisonment with hard labour and fined LE5,000 each. Azam, the central figure in the case, was sentenced to 15 years imprisonment with hard labour.

Security officers held back reporters who attempted to get closer to Azam and Ismail to ask their reaction to the sentences. Guards whisked the defendants out of the cage back to prison. Azam did not react but Ismail shouted: "This is unjust. This is unjust."

Azam's brother, Sami, surrounded by reporters, said he was "shocked and surprised" by the sentences. "Azam is innocent and I appeal to President Hosni Mubarak to release him," he said.

Sentences by State Security Courts cannot be appealed but must be approved by the prime minister, as required by the emergency law, in force since 1981. In the majority of previous cases, the sentences were ratified by the prime minister.

"We will take all the necessary legal measures to have Azam released," said Asaad Al-Asaad, a Druze leader and adviser to Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu. Al-Asaad, who had attended all the court hearings, added that he would contact Netanyahu to discuss the possibility of exchanging Azam with Egyptian prisoners held in Israeli jails. He said he accepted the court ruling, adding that he did not believe that the decision was politically-motivated. "Egypt and Israel have peaceful relations and we are sure that the Egyptian judiciary rules according to the evidence and documents it has," Al-Asaad said. But Al-Asaad, who is a former member of the Israeli parliament, blasted the Egyptian media "for condemning Azam long before the sentences were handed down."

The strongest reaction came from Israel. Netanyahu received Azam's brother Sami, his wife and children in his office on Monday, just 24 hours after the sentences were announced. Although Netanyahu stated that Egyptian-Israeli relations would survive the spying conviction, he sharply attacked the Egyptian judicial system and the court ruling. "This distorted ruling raises serious questions regarding the Egyptian judicial system," Netanyahu said in comments broadcast on Israel's army radio.

The prime minister stopped short of fully meeting a demand by Azam's brother to declare Azam a "prisoner of war," but said: "I am ready to say that we will act to bring him back."

Netanyahu said earlier that he had telephoned President Mubarak and told him that Israel expected him to pardon Azam. "I told him [Mubarak] that we expect him to find a way to pardon or release Azam and bring him back to Israel." He added, "As Prime Minister, I will not rest until he returns home."

In statements made on Sunday, Netanyahu described the conviction of Azam as an "outrage." "He did not spy even for a moment," he said. "I am sorry that the Egyptian judicial system worked against justice and truth."

Israeli President Ezer Weizman warned on Monday that the conviction of Azam could damage Egyptian-Israeli relations. "By condemning Azam Azam, who is innocent, Egypt has committed a grave error that is going to weigh heavily on relations between the two countries," Weizman told Israel radio. "I have enquired with both Mossad and Shin Beth [Israel's domestic intelligence agency] and I am certain that this verdict was unjustified," he added.

Azam and Ismail worked for a joint Egyptian-Israeli textile factory before their arrest in early November. Azam was accused of "complicity" in the crime of spying by handing Ismail women's underwear which, when washed, produced invisible ink that could be used to send letters to the Mossad. Prosecutors said the two Israeli women used sex and money to seduce Ismail and recruit him to work for the Mossad. He was asked to collect information on Egypt's new industrial cities and also on Egyptian workers in Jordan.

Azam's lawyer, Farid El-Deeb, claimed during his lengthy presentations that the case was political and an attempt by the Egyptian government to express its dissatisfaction with the hard-line policies of Netanyahu in peace talks with the Palestinians and Syria. El-Deeb, who was sharply criticised by his colleagues for taking Azam's case, alleged that the government wanted to halt the normalisation process with Israel and discourage Egyptians from travelling to Israel to seek work opportunities.

Ismail insisted throughout the trial that he was not a spy and that he was the one who informed Egyptian intelligence of his suspicions that the three other defendants were trying to recruit him to work for the Mossad. He added that a confession he wrote admitting that he and the three others worked for the Mossad was made under police pressure and torture and also in return for a false promise not to put him on trial.

Ismail's brother, Galal, said he was angered by the ruling and insisted that the case was fabricated.

The Azam trial was the first high-profile spy case since Egypt and Israel signed their peace treaty in 1979. Observers believe that Azam's imprisonment will now become an issue in any future talks between Egypt and Israel.

An official source, who requested anonymity, told *Al-Ahram Weekly*, "Egypt will not be blackmailed by Israel." He added that President Mubarak made it clear in his telephone conversation with Netanyahu on Sunday that "the Egyptian judiciary is independent and he cannot interfere in their decisions."

Foreign Minister Amr Moussa rejected the criticism coming from Israel as "not objective," adding that "no spy would be given special treatment or would be viewed in a special light."

Edited by **Wadie Kirolos**



Al-Ahram Weekly



PALESTINIAN children take part in a protest on Monday in Ein El-Helwa refugee camp in Sidon, Lebanon, against the decision of the UN Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) to reduce its budget by 20 per cent.
The UNRWA, which provides assistance to Palestinian refugees, says that it had to cut back its budget because donor nations have not increased their contributions since the agency was established in the early 1950s.
The UNRWA's decision will affect education and health services provided to an estimated 3.5 million Palestinians living in refugee camps in the West Bank, Gaza Strip, Lebanon, Syria and Jordan. The hardest hit would be those refugees living in the Palestinian self-rule areas and in Lebanon.
Education will no longer be free and medical care will be limited to emergency cases. Thousands of Palestinian students in the West Bank and Gaza are boycotting UNRWA-run schools in protest against the cuts.
Protests were also staged in Lebanon, where 350,000 Palestinian refugees live in camps. Palestinians fear that the UNRWA's decision is part of a scheme to force millions of Palestinian refugees all over the world to settle in other countries or seek the citizenship of their host countries, thus abandoning their right of return.
UNRWA's donor nations are scheduled to meet in Gaza in October to discuss the crisis, and Palestinian President Yasser Arafat said that he will intensify contacts to convince world countries to increase their donations to the UNRWA. *(photo: AFP)*

A dam on shifty sands

Israeli claims that Jordan has approved plans for a dam to be built in Syria's occupied Golan Heights were firmly denied by the Jordanians who feared another crisis in soured ties with Damascus. Lola Keilani reports from Amman

Jordanian officials were quick to preempt Syrian wrath with a categorical denial of reports saying that they approved Israeli plans to build a dam on the Yarmuk river in the occupied Golan. Prime Minister Abdel-Salam Majali and four of his ministers refuted the reports and underlined their commitment to Syrian sovereignty over the Golan.

Just before the Israeli claims were made, tension in Jordanian-Syrian relations was highlighted by reports in the Jordanian press to the effect that Damascus has abolished scholarships to Jordanian students at Syrian universities. Syria later denied the reports.

Jordanian Minister of State for Information Samir Mutawi, in a recent television interview, described the Israeli claims as baseless and said the Israelis aim to disrupt the brotherly relations between Jordan and Syria. He also accused Israel of seeking to embarrass Jordan before other Arabs.

The Jordanian minister said that Jordan would never approve of any arrangement that might in any way "affect or impinge upon Syrian, Palestinian, or Arab political rights and interests."

According to the 1994 Jordanian-Israeli peace treaty, the two countries agreed to build a dam that would provide Jordan with 50 million cubic metres of water. The dam, Jordanian officials say, was not planned to be in Syria's Golan Heights. Jordanian Minister of Water and Irrigation Munzer Haddadin said the proposed dam will not "infringe upon Syria's sovereignty or right to regain its occupied land."

Earlier, Israeli Water Commissioner Meir Ben-Meir told the newspaper *Haaretz* that the dam will be constructed at the edge of Himmeh enclave, a demilitarised zone in the southeast reaches of the occupied Golan Heights.

Haddadin flew to Israel last week to discuss the matter with Israeli officials. *Following a lengthy meeting with Israeli* Minister of Infrastructure Ariel Sharon, both ministers denied the dam reports and blamed the media for the "confusion" which had occurred.

A well-informed Jordanian official told *Al-Ahram Weekly* that Jordan submitted a request to Israel to move the dam's location a couple of kilometres to the south, in accordance with the original *plan reached with late Israeli Prime* Minister Yitzhak Rabin.

"The new location is a couple of kilometers away from the old one but it will save Jordan a great deal of embarrassment domestically and will not have a negative impact on Syria," said the official who requested anonymity.

The dam in question was supposed to be built close to Israeli-Jordanian borders, at a point roughly two kilometers away from the Syrian borders, but Israel *claimed that the old location of the dam* is not suitable because biblical antiquities were recently discovered in the site. The Israelis modified the project's maps, relocating the dam to the disputed Golan area, without consulting with the Jordanians.

Jordanian analysts suspect that Israel was trying to create a de facto situation in order to hold off and complicate peace talks with Syria. Israel, analysts say, could then argue that the dam's site, which was part of Palestine under the British mandate, is not historically Syrian.

Since October 1994, when Jordan signed its peace treaty with Israel, Syria has accused Jordan of breaking Arab ranks. The ties between the two Arab countries have been uneasy since then. Jordanian Deputy Prime Minister Abdullah Ensour, fearing a further deterioration, was eager to describe the relations with Syria as "brotherly."

Damascus has been particularly friendly to Jordan's opposition parties who are hostile to the normalisation of ties with Israel. Jordanian opposition figures visiting Syria routinely receive red carpet treatment. Top Syrian officials entertain them and Syrian media highlight their statements, particularly the parts in which they denounce their country's ties with Israel.

Jordan and Syria have their own water disputes too. Amman has been trying unsuccessfully to reach agreement with Damascus concerning the sharing of the Yarmuk waters. The recent episode is a reminder of the fragile nature of Jordanian-Syrian relations.

Analysis

Metamorphosis of Zionism



One hundred years after the first Zionist Congress was held in Basle, Switzerland, in 1897, Mohamed El-Sayed Said *argues that the racist and closed ideology will either suddenly collapse or shrink in relevance until it gets pushed into oblivion*

Peace in the Middle East is explored through a variety of approaches, essentially strategic, political and psychological. Recently, an additional approach to peace has been emerging. The essential premise of this approach is that peace could be established if the ideas of people engaged in wars could be changed. In other words, this approach to peace addresses *the ideological foundations* and motives for war and aggression.

But how can we possibly change the ideas of people and, more difficult still, the ideologies of given states and elites?

Certain international institutions such as UNESCO are convinced that war stems from the minds of people. But neither these nor specialised institutions of academic knowledge know much about ways of persuading people out of their traditional convictions or charming states away from their classic ideologies. The difficulty is even greater when ideology forms the very justification for statehood, not just an excuse for the way states behave.

This latter point bears immediately on the state of Israel and its ideology, Zionism. Without the ideology, the very existence of the state becomes lacking in justification or intellectual reasoning.

We know, however, that ideologies, like all living systems, do change. They are given birth, they grow, they gain youth and *strength, they age and* eventually perish.

-Even Zionism?

-Yes, even Zionism.

The state of Israel may have the unique privilege of being exempted from the obligations of international law and decent behaviour in the international system. But neither the state nor its ideology enjoy a complete immunity from the trappings of life, since the unconditional support by the US and its *omnipotent* Congress is a little less than a full and comprehensive insurance against ideological metamorphosis!

Again, how do ideologies change?

Every ideology includes statements on the definition of the social self, the interpretations of its relationship to the world outside it, tasks or missions to be carried out in the name of the social self and its ideals or interests, and lastly statements discrediting other actors seen to oppose this ideology.

In all these aspects *of ideology*, Zionism is faced with immense challenges from within and without.

The international Jewry is the exclusive focus of Zionism. However, "who is the Jew?" is the question that has puzzled the state since its birth. The mythical character of Zionism has been strictly maintained by promoting the narrative that modern Jews are the descendants of the twelve tribes who inhabited the land of Palestine two to three thousand years ago. Evidence on the falsity of this claim is accumulating through *historiographical research*, such as that of Arthur Koestler who argues that most modern-day Jews are the descendants of people who inhabited parts of the former Soviet Union and are of Slavic and Turkish origin. They have never had anything to do with Palestine or the twelve tribes of original Jews who happened to inhabit it.

Israel and international Zionism have managed to insulate Jews in the mythical narrative on the origin of modern-day Jews. There is, however, no easy way to escape the schism on the definition of the Jew. The irony of this definition, as projected in the domestic Israeli political arena, is that Zionism will have to face the rift between its essentially religious frame of reference, which constitutes its very justification however false, on the one hand, and its pseudo-secular nationalist conclusions which formed the basis of its link and adherence to modernity and modern institutions, on the other.

The more people come to distance themselves from the religious myth, the more they feel pressed to change their outlook to religion as nationhood, and the more they do so, the less their outlook will be logically consistent with the religious justification for being in the land of Palestine. Jews could continue to live there as citizens of a secular state but in this case there should be no reason why they insist on withholding this citizenship from the Arabs who have inhabited this land for thousands of years, according to historic documents.

This is more or less the intellectual basis of what Azmy Bishara, an Arab-Israeli member of the Knesset (Israeli parliament) and peace activist, along with others, called Israel to become: a state for all its citizens or even better for all its inhabitants. This is also what a significant number of Arabs are calling for: a secular, democratic state.

Zionism has distinguished itself from the humanist and socialist traditions of Jews of eastern and central Europe before the second world war by arguing the impossibility of reconciling Jews with Gentiles and asserting that the two worlds are intrinsically irreconcilable. Thus, the establishment of a Jewish state, it was argued, was the only solution to the paradox that Jews could only exist along with Gentiles at the risk of their own oppression.

This mythology is constantly inflamed by the memories of the Holocaust. But the Holocaust is history. Now we are having the more potent mythology of the invincible Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) and the more than powerful Zionist lobbies in the US and Western Europe. Pitting Jews against the rest of the world is no longer possible except by misuse of mythology and abuse of power. Excessive and artificial fears lead to big mistakes where Jewish power is collectively becoming abusive and insulting, possibly awakening dormant distrust among Gentiles. In brief, wisdom may entail sensible working for sensible integration that works against the myth that Israel is the only salvation for Jews. Life proves *this again and again. In general, Israelis* and Jews prefer living in the North American diaspora than in the promised land. Worse still, if Israel continues to oppress and colonise the lands of Arabs, it will never manage to provide such security as promised by Zionism.

The latter point indicates the most serious contradiction in the Zionist meta-narrative. Simply, the land promised to the Jews by their own God was far from empty. It was and still is inhabited by another population, the Palestinians. Politics of denial as well as extreme violence have proven far from adequate in making Palestinians vanish. They are there and they will continue to provide a living limitation to the meta-narrative of Zionism. Logically speaking, a policy that continues to deny Palestinians their existence as an independent people will entail the continuation of violence. Accordingly, insecurity will continue and so will the myth that Israel is the only secure place for Jews. Indeed, Israel will continue to be the least secure place for Jews. On the other hand, recognising Palestinians and their fundamental, inalienable rights constitutes a practical falsification of the Zionist mythology.

The mythology surrounding the Palestinians is already being discredited by post-Zionist historiographers. The very phenomenon of post-Zionism is a symptom of ideological metamorphosis. But the flowering of the phenomenon still awaits the full disclosure of secrets pertaining to the scandalous Israeli diplomacy *and politics in the region*, especially vis-à-vis the Palestinians. Some of this may have already started through the confessions on Israeli crimes during the 1956 and 1967 wars.

Now, we come to the essence of all ideologies, actions and missions. Many themes are involved in this junction: the transformation of the oppressed Jew into a soldier and consequently into an oppressor, the reconstitution of a nation through the right of return, the control of biblical Palestine by force of arms and eventually the forcing of Arabs into acceptance and the legitimisation of the above.

Some of these missions are carried out but none of them was truly accomplished in full. Israel has become a society through voluntary and forced migration of Jews into Palestine. However, the society continues to be closer to a military castle than to a civil (not to speak of decent) estate. With all its motives and privileges, Israel managed to attract only less than one third of world Jewry. Most of those who came recently from the former Soviet Union look to Israel as a temporary station and, if granted visas, would prefer to leave for other rich countries. Israel has won many wars, now controls more than Mandate Palestine and seems to have neutralised some Arab states, but it continues to be far from having secured peace for itself and even further from gaining legitimacy and acceptance by the Arabs.

The fact that Israel will have to choose between a historical compromise based on withdrawal from the occupied Arab territories in return for recognition and peace, and the continuation of war is certainly too serious. The presumption made by people like Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu that the state can have it both ways will prove absolutely mistaken and will push the region further into a climate of hate and violence. Peace may escape Israel altogether if it fails to strike the right deal at the right moment. Many Israelis know this well and know also that the Arabs, however weak and plagued with problems, will eventually stand on their feet and manage to constitute a real threat to their security and their state.

Given the nature of the challenges facing Zionism, two visions on the future of Israel emerge. The one advocated by Former Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres places the focus on economic and cultural achievements and calls for less focus on territorial expansion and military prowess. This is viewed as the means to promote both the power and the attractiveness of the state in the eyes of international Jewry. Peace is regarded as an essential prelude for the progress of the country's economy and culture.

The other trend is symbolised by Netanyahu and right-wing Infrastructure Minister Ariel Sharon who conceive of Israel only in biblical terms. Military power is considered the only means of controlling land and achieving security, even at the risk of low standards of economic and cultural performance.

Both visions bear on the future of Zionism. The *former vision eventually* yields to economic Zionism. This new form better responds to the attractions of modern life but it will certainly erode the messianistic connotations of an ideology based on medieval and archaic mythology. The latter aims to reinforce this zeal, but it will entail that Israel continues living in a climate of fear and under conditions of total alienation in the world arena.

Balances of interests within Israeli society between these two visions are currently quite fragile and critical. The ideology will have to be *swayed in* this or that direction so as to create the consensus needed for the internal stability of the political community. Rift and possible violence are certain to result from lack of ideological credibility and competent response.

As a general rule, a closed ideology such as Zionism tends to fail in generating adequate intellectual power for self-renewal. It is more likely that such an ideology will either suddenly collapse under the *strain of accumulated counter-evidence, or shrink* in relevance, explanatory and guiding power until it gets pushed into oblivion. Many Israeli intellectuals have virtually come close to the latter situation by arguing the intrinsic poverty and evil of nationalism, at least in relation to peace-making. While they condemn nationalism in general, they have at least come to recognise the intrinsic evil and destructiveness of Zionism.

The writer is deputy director of Al-Ahram Centre for Political and Strategic Studies.

Libya: A show of defiance

Still living under the cloud of international sanctions, Libya this week celebrated its revolution anniversary with a message of defiance to the West

Celebrating the 28th anniversary of the military coup which brought Muammar Gaddafi to power together with a group of young revolutionary army officers, the state-run television showed fighters, helicopters and other military aircraft flying over the capital. The display included fighters bought from France and the former Soviet Union and lasted about three hours, news agencies reported.

"This force is ours to face anyone who dares attack this country," the television commentator said.

Tripoli-based diplomats said the air show was the first of its kind since the UN Security Council imposed an air and arms embargo against Libya in April 1992 for its alleged involvement in the bombing of a Pan Am airliner over Lockerbie, Scotland in 1988, in which 270 people were killed.

The United States pressed the Security Council to impose sanctions on Libya in order to force Gaddafi to hand over two Libyans for trial in either the US or Britain. The two were suspected of involvement in the bombing. Gaddafi rejected the US request and suggested the men be tried in a third country other than the US or Britain or by a special tribunal set up by the International Court of Justice. The US and Britain rejected the idea.

Libya was in a festive mood throughout the week. On Sunday night, the Libyan leader failed to show up for a rally marking the revolution's anniversary in the city of Sirte, 450 kilometres west of the capital Tripoli, but addressed the nation on television.

The veteran rebel launched into his trade-mark attacks against the United States, Israel and the West and denounced corruption in his country. "Some people have abused their positions for personal benefit," Gaddafi told the Libyans. "We did not make sacrifices so that we could buy nice or imported soft drinks. The sacrifices were for the masses," he added.

While he stressed the need to crack down on corruption and the smuggling of subsidised goods and products out of the country, Gaddafi sought to exonerate himself and his theories from blame. "I am not responsible for anything that was done in the name of the Green Book (the philosophy of the revolution written by Gaddafi in the mid-seventies). There are many cases where the Green Book has been misinterpreted and this leads to corruption and mistakes."

The revolutionary leader also warned his people that the West, meaning the United States and Europe, wish to control Libya primarily because of its oil reserves. Gaddafi said that his country's annual revenue from oil and gas exports are estimated at $9 billion. But oil might not be the sole reason for the West's interest in Libya. The leader went on explaining to his people:

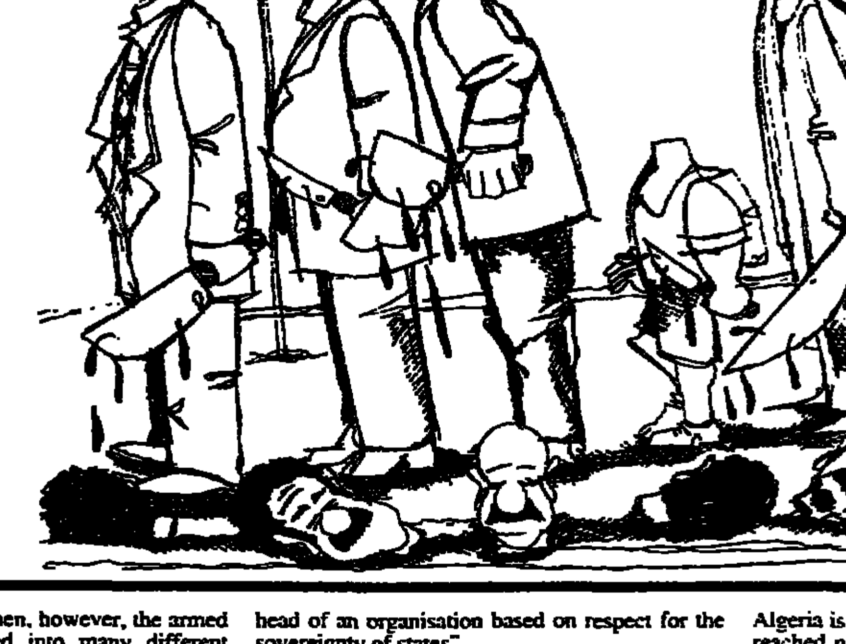
"The Western countries might invade you one day because of your sun. They don't have sun to produce solar energy, and Libya is a sunny country ... Sand is a raw material, and the Libyan sand is of high quality ...They might colonise you for your watermelons, which are excellent because of the quality of Libya's sand. Libya has more than 1,200 kilometres of coast on the Mediterranean. They might colonise you for that. The Libyan dates cannot be matched. They might want to take them. The camel is also a reason for them to invade Libya. The camel is unique because he can go for months without drinking. He also has good milk. In fact, why do you import milk from Europe when you have the camel's milk."

At the celebration in Sirte, members of the Green Revolutionary Guard, clad in fatigues and green turbans, chanted just a few of the many titles Gaddafi has taken on over the past 28 years: "The lone hawk... the challenger... *the thinker... Colonel* of the Arab revolution... God's caliph." After each name, fellow soldiers yelled back the word "unity". The soldiers then took an oath of loyalty to Gaddafi: "If death is decreed for us, we welcome it for your sake."

In an interview on Libyan television on Sunday, Gaddafi blasted US "imperialists" and condemned the UN sanctions imposed on his country. But his strongest comments were reserved for fellow Arabs. He accused them of forgetting the dream of Arab unity and bowing to the will of the United States and Israel. "The Arab official system is a failure. It would be better for it to disappear," he said.

Compiled by staff

Algeria: after the massacre



As the Algerian government brusquely declines Abassi Madani's offer to call a cease-fire in the wake of the Sidi Rais massacre, the search for explanations for the present cycle of violence still seems as fruitless as ever. Heba Saleh reports

Algeria's military-backed authorities have moved swiftly to quell an attempt by Abassi Madani, leader of the illegal Islamic Salvation Front (FIS), to reinstate his party as a key player in the political process. *According to an Interior Ministry* statement, Madani has been placed under house arrest, and from now on must limit his contacts to members of his family. In mid-July, Madani was released on parole, having served five years out of a 12-year jail term. No explanation for his release was offered at the time. The Interior Ministry now says he may be sent back to jail if he persists in violating the conditions of his parole, which include refraining from political activity and not making statements to the press.

The wrath of the authorities was provoked by a letter that Madani wrote to the UN secretary-general, Kofi Annan, saying that he was prepared "to call for an immediate end to the bloodshed with a view to holding serious dialogue" with the government. The offer prompted a flurry of interviews with the international media in which Madani said he "would not have dared make this offer" had he not had the assurances of armed groups around the country that they would heed a call for peace if it came from him.

The current violence in Algeria began in 1992. The army suspended the elections that were in progress when it became clear that the FIS was heading for a landslide victory. Shortly afterwards the party was outlawed and thousands of its supporters were thrown into prison or held in detention camps in the desert. Radical Islamists who were still at liberty took up arms against the state. Since then, however, the armed movement has splintered into many different groups. The most vicious of these is the mysterious Armed Islamic Group (GIA) which stands accused of most of the violence that has been perpetrated against civilians in the central regions around Algiers. The FIS has criticised the GIA for espousing extremist interpretations of Islam which allow it to justify violence. It also claims that the GIA has been extensively infiltrated by the security forces.

The FIS itself has an armed wing, the Islamic Salvation Army (AIS), with bases in both the eastern and western parts of the country. The AIS claims its activities are limited to strikes against military targets. Algeria's state-censored media almost never report AIS attacks, though the group itself periodically announces raids against the military which are almost always impossible to confirm.

Madani's letter to Annan was written in response to a recent remark by the secretary-general, who said that the world could not stand by and abandon Algeria to its fate. The Secretary-General was speaking in the aftermath of the horrific massacre at Sidi Rais, the worst so far in the five-year conflict, when between 200 and 300 civilians were slaughtered in a village to the south of Algiers. Words of condemnation were not enough, he said: what was necessary was discreet action to promote peace.

Predictably, Annan's words brought an angry rebuff from the Algerian authorities, who described them as unacceptable and accused the Secretary-General of "exceeding his role as the head of an organisation based on respect for the sovereignty of states".

Annan's remarks had suggested that the UN might have been considering actively intervening in Algeria — something which it now denies. At the same time, Madani's offer had presented him as the key to any attempt to restore the peace. The angry reaction of the authorities was probably an attempt to pre-empt any build-up of international pressure to negotiate with the FIS. Analysts believe there are persisting divisions within the regime over the question of whether the FIS in its new weakened state should be allowed a role in bringing about a settlement. There had been much speculation when Madani was released that such a role was being envisaged for him — though that role would clearly have been limited by the new political order established over the last three years by President Liamine Zeroual.

The first brick in this institutional edifice was Zeroual's own election to the presidency in 1995, and was followed a year later by a new constitution outlawing political parties based on religion and concentrating power in the hands of the president. This year has seen the setting up of a new party, the National Democratic Rally (RDN), that is clearly intended as a vehicle to channel popular support behind the president. It was the RDN that won the flawed elections in June, and which is now the senior partner in the three-party governing coalition. Real power, however, remains in the hands of the president and the military.

Despite these exercises in institution-building, Algeria is still plagued by the violence which has reached new peaks of horror over the past year. The countryside around Algiers has been struck by a series of bizarre massacres which started last November. Bombs periodically explode in public places in the capital, killing innocent civilians. But it is the ease with which groups of armed men have repeatedly massacred hundreds of civilians less than an hour's drive from the capital which is raising many awkward questions.

Since the election, at least 1,500 Algerians have had their throats cut in night-time raids against villages. These raids have been carried out in an area where there are heavy concentrations of government troops who, survivors claim, generally fail to come to the rescue of the victims. In the worst such attack a week ago in Sidi Rais, the killers arrived in a convoy of trucks and cars and spent four hours decapitating their victims, and in some cases burning their houses. Between 200 and 300 men, women, children and even babies died in horrific ways, and for no apparent reason.

The government rarely comments on the massacres, except to say that they were committed by terrorists taking their revenge on an unsupportive population. No information, however, is provided as to why particular villages have been targeted, or which group committed the killings. This obscurity which surrounds the carnage, and the mounting scale and frequency of the attacks, are starting to raise questions as to the possible implication in the violence of other forces.

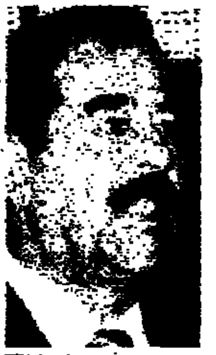
Few people doubt that the GIA is involved in the killings. But citing the mysterious GIA raises more questions than it answers. Opposition sources say that at least some of the violence may be due to the local self-defence groups that were set up and armed by the state. The arming of civilians appears to have led to cycles of reprisal, pitting the families of the armed groups' victims against villagers known to support the militants. Some analysts also say that factional disputes within the regime might be a contributory factor to the continuation of the violence.

The truth is that even journalists, opposition activitists and Western diplomats working in Algeria are at a loss to explain the carnage. Although Algeria has an independent press, proper investigative reporting has come to a standstill following the assassination of more than 50 journalists, and the problem is compounded by government censorship. The foreign press has only limited access to areas directly affected by the violence, and journalists must be accompanied by members of the security forces at all times. The opposition Socialist Forces Front (FFS) has called a demonstration for 11 September to condemn the violence and protest against what it described as the silence of both the Algerian authorities and the international community. Party leader Hocine Ait Ahmed, this week reiterated his demand for an international fact-finding mission to travel to Algeria to look into the violence.

Heba Saleh is the BBC North Africa correspondent. She contributed this article to Al-Ahram Weekly.

Iraqi-Iranian trial balloons?

Iraqi and Iranian officials recently expressed a desire to improve their bilateral relations. Hussein Al-Qassimi examines whether the two countries will ever overcome the wounds caused by their 1980-88 war


Hussein


Khatami

During most of the century, Iraqi-Iranian relations have been uneasy and sometimes tense. And in 1980, the two countries engaged in a devastating war that lasted eight years and inflicted heavy losses in both human and infrastructural terms. Now, voices on both sides of the border are calling for cooperation and even a military alliance between yesterday's bitter enemies. Do these calls signal a fundamental shift in the politics of the two governments or are they merely trial balloons?

The most significant change came two weeks ago from *Babil*, the newspaper owned and run by Iraqi President Saddam Hussein's eldest son, Uday. In a front-page editorial, the newspaper called upon Iran to forget the past and join Iraq and Syria in a military alliance to confront the much-talked-about Israeli-Turkish military alliance. According to *Babil*, such an alliance would put the three countries in a better position to defeat what it termed "the Zionist danger and American hegemony." A few days later came a positive Iranian response from the hard-liner Muhsen Riza'ei, the commander of the country's powerful Revolutionary Guards.

But did the old foes really undergo a change of heart? Are they capable of changing their policies of mistrust of each other? And should the rest of the world take these events at prima facie?

To answer these questions, one should examine Iraq's motives for such an alliance. The most obvious motivation on the Iraqi side is that Saddam wants to break the regional and international isolation imposed on his regime after he invaded Kuwait in August 1990. An alliance with Iran and Syria would most certainly bring him back to the centre stage of Middle Eastern politics.

To prove that he really means business, Saddam decided to allow Iranian pilgrims to visit the Shi'ite holy shrines in Iraq, a religious duty they have been denied for more than 20 years. Although Iran immediately welcomed the move, officials in Tehran complained on Monday that Iraq was delaying agreement on the organisation of the arrival of Iranian pilgrims.

To show that these unexpected gestures did not come as a result of weakness, Iraq laid some preconditions for an alliance with Iran. It demands that Iran release all Iraqi prisoners of war, the return of more than 100 military and civilian planes flown to Iran during the 1991 Gulf War and ending once and for all hostilities against Iraq. Such preconditions can hardly be encouraging for Tehran to cooperate with Baghdad, let alone enter a military alliance.

Iran, for its part, insists that Iraq first free all Iranian prisoners of war it claims Iraq still holds. It also refuses to return the airplanes before Iraq pays Iran billions of dollars in war reparations for damage caused by the 1980-1988 war. Moreover, Iran accuses Iraq of harbouring thousands of Mujahideen Khalq rebels who often infiltrate into Iran to carry out sabotage operations against government and army positions. Meanwhile, Iraq has repeatedly denied that it holds Iranian POWs. It also rejects Iran's claims to war reparations and accuses Iran of interfering in Iraq's internal affairs by backing the Kurds in the north and hosting Shi'ite opposition groups working to overthrow Saddam.

Thus, the problems between the two neighbours seem to be too deep-seated to be settled by goodwill gestures. The arguments for a bilateral military alliance currently being mooted, therefore, seem to ignore the reality of the situation. The two regimes completely distrust each other because of the untold suffering inflicted on both countries during their prolonged war. Even the most optimistic analyst cannot conceptualise a genuine reconciliation taking place between the two nations before the wounds of that war are healed.

So, what is behind the courting statements emanating from both Baghdad and Tehran?

From Saddam Hussein's point of view, warmer ties with Iran, whose new president is a moderate willing to build cordial relations with foreign countries, would help Iraq acquire a window onto the outside world. Improved ties with Iran would enable Saddam to contain better the dangers posed by the Kurds in the north and the Shi'ites in the south. One of the immediate results of an open-border relationship with Iran and consequent visits by Iranian pilgrims is the expected inflow of badly needed foreign currency and Iranian goods to Iraq. The importance of such cross-border exchange is illustrated by the fact that some 180,000 Iranian pilgrims flock to Syria every year and inject some $200 million into the Syrian economy.

However, there is nothing so far to prove that the wish for an Iraqi-Iranian alliance is mutual. Riza'ei's remarks cannot be taken as a policy statement. While the new Iranian President Mohamed Khatami looks determined to end Iran's isolation and improve its relations with the rest of the world, his priorities do not seem to include Iraq. Like other countries in the region, Iran has adopted a wait-and-see policy towards Saddam's regime until the clouds created by the 1991 Gulf War clear and the future of Iraq is determined.

Meanwhile, anxious Iranian pilgrims in strictly controlled tours can cross the border and visit the Shi'ite holy shrines in Najaf and Karbala, and traders — watched and sponsored by government officials — can exchange goods on both sides of the war-battered borders. But such movements will certainly not amount to a solid base for a military alliance between the two old enemies.

The tragic fact is that when Iranians or Iraqis cross the border points they have to pass through what remains of a vast battlefield where at least one million of their young men lost their lives in a tragic war.

Behind the rhetoric of the calls for an Iraqi-Iranian military alliance lies the bitter reality of visceral mistrust between the two neighbours. This mistrust is best exemplified by the interpretations of the 1980-1988 war as reported in the official media of the two countries. While the Iraqi media still call the war a replay of the 539 BC conquest of Babylon by Persian emperor Cyrus, their Iranian counterparts consider the war a conspiracy aimed at destroying the regime of the Islamic revolution only one year after its inception. Such widely diverging positions can only prevent the two countries from understanding each other, let alone achieving a military alliance.

Hussein Al-Qassimi is an Iraqi journalist based in Cairo.

Key partner skips Sudan summit

Will South African President Nelson Mandela's convening of a summit meeting between Uganda's Yoweri Museveni and Sudan's Omar Al-Bashir break the Sudanese deadlock? asks Gamal Nkrumah

Last Sunday, South African President Nelson Mandela hosted a summit meeting in Pretoria between Uganda's President Yoweri Museveni and his Sudanese counterpart Omar Hassan Al-Bashir. Also present was Zimbabwean President Robert Mugabe, the current chairman of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU). John Garang, the leader of the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA), — the *main*, predominantly southern, military group fighting against Sudanese government forces — declined to attend the summit meeting.

On his way back home from South Africa, Al-Bashir stopped over in the Tanzanian capital Dar-es-Salam and told reporters at the airport that Khartoum will not renew diplomatic relations with Kampala because Uganda did not guarantee that it would stop its military backing for the SPLA.

The two-day summit was *arranged* to pave the way for an end to the cycle of war in Sudan which has claimed the lives of over one million Sudanese and has created one of Africa's biggest and most intractable refugee problems. There are an estimated seven million Sudanese nationals who have fled their homeland. No statistics exist for the internally displaced Sudanese who have fled to the capital Khartoum and other parts of the country which are not directly affected by the 14-year-old war.

The summit was not a total failure. It was seen as a first step towards discussing touchy issues. "We are at an extra sensitive stage, and the problem with these matters is that progress is made only if there is an element of confidentiality," Mandela told reporters in Pretoria on Tuesday. South Africa is keen to let the Sudanese peace talks continue under the auspices of the seven-nation East African Intergovernmental Agency for Drought and Development.

The South Africans were at pains to explain that Mandela's commitment to promoting peace in Sudan was not limited to a one-off attempt to persuade Garang to meet Al-Bashir. Mandela urged Sudan's warring parties to accept a cease-fire on 12 August. But while Al-Bashir accepted, Garang declined. Garang met Mandela in South Africa last Thursday, but he refused to stay on in the country for the summit meeting.

Garang accuses Al-Bashir of "trying to sell Reik Machar as the new southern Sudanese leader." Machar, the head of the newly formed Southern Sudanese Coordination Council (SSCC) which is made up of southerners who hate or fear Garang, was in South Africa recently and met with Mandela.

Uganda's President Museveni is a close personal friend of Garang and the two were "ideological soul mates" during their college days in Dar-es-Salam, Tanzania, in the 1970s. Al-Bashir recently warned that Uganda was the main backer of the SPLA, while Museveni accuses Al-Bashir of supporting the Ugandan armed opposition group, the Lord's Resistance Army, which is spearheading an armed uprising in northern Uganda.

But Yassir Arman, SPLA spokesman, told *Al-Ahram Weekly* that "the neighbouring countries, like Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya and Uganda do not back the SPLA militarily and have never embarked on military attacks or incursions inside Sudan in conjunction with the SPLA." He stressed that even though the SPLA has representative offices in these countries, and even though most of the governments of these countries are sympathetic to the SPLA cause, they limit their backing to logistical and moral support. Arman noted that "the Sudanese government is trying to mend fences with its African neighbours and is making desperate efforts to break the vicious cycle of being treated as an international pariah state."

The American ambassador to Sudan, who had lived in neighbouring Kenya for two years, has recently returned to his post in Khartoum. The Sudanese government, once reliant on foreign aid for almost half its budget, is today starved of foreign funds because of the international embargo and the hostility of the West to Khartoum's Islamist government.

"The civil war in Sudan is essentially about the distribution of the national cake," Arman explained. "The SPLA argues that successive Sudanese governments have not been adept at justly distributing the wealth of the country. There is no social justice in Sudan and that is why the SPLA took up arms against the government. The current regime, which seized power in a military takeover in 1989, is more vicious than its civilian predecessors in oppressing the marginalised people of Sudan and has embarked on a ruthless policy of Arabisation, Islamisation and genocide," he added.

The SPLA says that income differentials have widened considerably since Al-Bashir came to power. "The ideology of the speaker of the Sudanese Legislative Assembly, the powerful NIF (National Islamic Front) leader Hassan Al-Turabi, reinforces the injustices of the past and that is why the southern Sudanese people and all the oppressed and marginalised peoples of Sudan have identified Al-Turabi and his NIF as the enemy. They do not help the cause of Islam, rather they hamper it," Arman told the *Weekly*. Al-Turabi accompanied Bashir to South Africa.

According to the SPLA, the civil war that has ravaged the country is essentially an economic war waged by the marginalised peoples of southern, western and eastern Sudan against the hegemony of the central region focussed on the capital Khartoum. Southerners complain that very little of Sudan's wealth has trickled beyond Khartoum to the outlying regions.

Last year the economic situation reached an all-time low. Certain sections of the population are, however, now benefiting from the status quo. Cotton-growers are currently making huge profits because international cotton prices are on the increase. But Sudan's annual per capita income is just under $100 a year. The unemployment rate is estimated at 50 per cent and those Sudanese fortunate enough to have jobs scrape by on monthly incomes of less than $25. Meanwhile, a loaf of bread costs over 25 US cents and a bus ticket costs 15 cents.

While the World Bank has withdrawn its aid to Sudan, the effects of its policies continue because the Sudanese government has, by and large, stuck to the age-old remedy of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund — hit the poorest hardest. The deplorable state of the country's infrastructure, educational and health services constitutes a perennial barrier to social and economic development.

Edited by **Khaled Dawoud**

Al-Ahram Weekly



Man with a mission

In an exclusive interview with Ibrahim Nafie in Pretoria, South African President Nelson Mandela stressed that Africa is pushing hard for having a bigger say in the vital issues that affect it. Africans must resolve African problems, he emphasised

Mandela has long dissociated himself from the West. "The West's friends are not necessarily my friends," he is often quoted as saying. Mandela has befriended world leaders who are anathema to the Western powers, leaders like Cuba's Fidel Castro and Libya's Muammar Gaddafi. Mandela's government ended the once close association between Israel and South Africa and ushered in a new era of cooperation between South Africa, Egypt and the entire Arab World.

When he took office, President Nelson Mandela said that he was elected because his people wanted change. He added that they were to have the changes that they long yearned for. Today, Mandela presides over the African continent's most impressive democratisation process. He is constructing his "rainbow nation" and trying hard to heal the wounds of the past. His challenge is to make all the people of South Africa happy. This is no easy task because there are various ethnic, racial and religious groups in South Africa. Mandela's mission is to transform the aspirations of his people into reality.

President Mandela, who has visited Egypt several times in the past, extolled Egypt's historical commitment to the liberation struggle in Africa generally and South Africa in particular. Mandela has become something of a peacemaker, both in Africa and around the world. In Africa, Mandela presided over the peace talks between President Laurent Désiré Kabila of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and ousted former President of Zaire Mobutu Sese Seku. He is today spearheading efforts to find a solution to the Sudanese crisis and to stop the civil war that has ravaged Egypt's southern neighbour since 1983. Following is the full text of the interview:

As a great African leader, what are your opinions on several topics relating to international, domestic and regional issues. But let us begin with bilateral relations with Egypt. You have occasional contacts with President Mubarak. What are the issues you mainly deal with? And what is their significance?

Egypt occupies a special position which enables the country to take part in affairs in Africa, in the Middle East and in the Islamic world. There are few countries that occupy that special position, and then Egypt has produced very outstanding leaders. Colonel Gamal Abdel-Nasser, who was one of the founders of the Non-Aligned Movement — he was one of the top five [leaders] who appeared in Bandung in 1955 and the role he played in the power blocs on this continent has been an important one. He was one of the leading members of the Casablanca Group of Nations as against the Monrovia Group, and the Casablanca Group was up front in supporting liberation movements throughout the continent. It is that significance that Egypt has. I had the honour of meeting him and I have been tremendously impressed by his commitment to the total liberation of Africa. He has played a leading role in the liberation, not only of Africa generally, but of South Africa in particular.

Although the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) meets repeatedly to deal with African crises, foreign powers still take the decisions and the measures to defuse them. When do you think the OAU will begin to play a more significant role?

Well, the OAU is playing a very important role, but we must not expect the problems of Africa to be solved overnight. It is a process — a process firstly of human resource development. Without knowledge, skills, techniques and experience, it is not going to be possible for us to make a maximal impact in addressing the problems that face the continent. One must understand that power and influence also contribute towards the solution of problems. Africa is busy gaining that power and influence. I have no doubt that in due course they will be able to master the problems, not only of the continent but of the world. Africa is already making quite a powerful impact as far as the United Nations is concerned. The OAU is able to sit down as an organisation, take a stand on issues and make sure that those issues receive the proper attention by world forums. And I think we are coming. ...y so... we will be saying we have arrived.

You have said that your visit to Israel is contingent on the progress of the solution to the Palestinian issue. Are you still committed to your position? How would you describe South Africa's relations with Israel now?

Our policy is to develop good relations with all countries, irrespective of the role they played during the apartheid era. But my visit to Israel has been postponed two times. Although we had fixed a date, the problems that occurred between Israel and Palestine prevented us from going. I hope that there will be a time in the future when things will be such that I will be able to pay a visit, not only to Israel, but to Palestine as well because Yasser Arafat is a close friend of the liberation movement of South Africa. He is our close friend now and we cannot go to Israel without visiting him.

The Middle East region seems to be going through a very difficult stage and the peace process is facing a very serious crisis. How do you view Israel's commitment to the establishment of peace under Netanyahu's government? What are the obstacles to peace and what could be the means to achieve progress?

I hope that the leadership of Israel will realise how important it is for them to commit themselves to the agreements which have been reached between Israel and Palestine, which raise the hope of peace in the region. I sincerely hope that the friends of Israel will draw its attention to the agreements that have been made because these agreements lay a framework for a forward movement. Insofar as the rest of the Middle East [is concerned], I have full confidence in the leadership of the Arab states. They are committed to peace and they will play their role towards the achievement of peace.

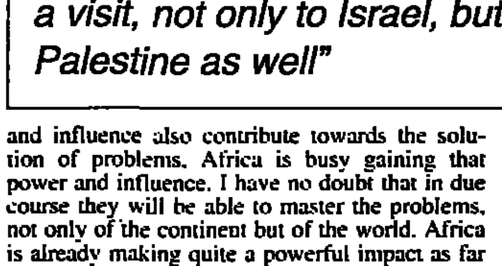
Do you think that South Africa's efforts to make arms deals with Arab countries have been affected by US pressures to stop a projected arms deal with Syria? What has become of this deal?

No country can dictate to us, no matter what it is. We would like to keep friendly relations with all countries big or small, but on one condition: that they respect our sovereignty and independence. I want to repeat that we will allow no country to dictate to us, and the agreements we have made with other countries will stand — whatever other countries think of them.

It was said that Iran sought South African cooperation in producing nuclear weapons. Would you comment?

I have no information to that effect and, therefore, I will not be able to comment.

"The problems that occurred between Israel and Palestine prevented us from going (to Israel) I hope that there will be a time in the future when things will be such that I will be able to pay a visit, not only to Israel, but to Palestine as well"



You have lately met with Sudanese President Al-Bashir in an effort to mediate in ending the war in southern Sudan. What are the prospects of achieving a just solution through your mediation?

We have been asked to try and help. It is not an initiative that originates from us. We have been asked by friends of the Sudan to assist and we are doing so. I have met President Al-Bashir as well as Dr. John Garang. I think with both of them there is a will; they are committed to peace and bringing them together will eventually lead to a breakthrough.

What about Mr Garang?

No, Mr Garang will not be seeing me. He was supposed to see me today, but unfortunately there were problems with his transport. We are trying to help to ensure that he comes to South Africa and I am giving the necessary instructions for him to be helped with transport so that he can come over.

Mr. President, do you think that there will be a dispute between Egypt, Nigeria and South Africa over the new seat that may be offered to Africa on the UN Security Council?

I do not think there will be any conflict at all. Egypt, South Africa and Nigeria are all brothers; any of them who succeeds, we will congratulate. The issue is actually up to the OAU,[which will decide] after the UN settles how many seats will be allotted to African countries. We are adamant about asking for two seats, but various views have come up. The US is proposing one seat for each of the three regions. However, no final decision has been taken.

Do you think that South Africa has a moral responsibility to pressure Israel to abandon its nuclear arsenal?

This is a question for the UN, for world bodies — there are structures that deal with that matter. We do not want to act unilaterally, we act through the structures that have been set up by the world community. If any pressures are going to be exerted on Israel, it must be done through the relevant structures.

When will you come to Egypt?

I will pass through Egypt in October when I will visit the region.

Will the visit also include Saudi Arabia and Oman?

This is a possibility; we are going through the Middle East.

Are you going to discuss selling arms to Saudi Arabia and Kuwait?

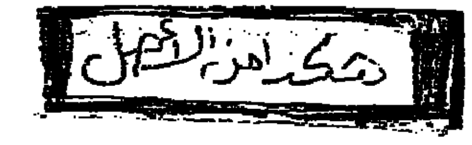
I cannot discuss this in advance. It is an issue of bilateral relations, which will be discussed at the table with the leaders I will be meeting.

Egypt is keen to join the African economic community. What is the South African position on this issue?

This issue is being dealt with in the joint committees.

The last question is a hard one. You are in love and your love story is covered by the world media. Will you marry the lady?

This question should be directed to Mrs Graça Machel.



Put out the lights

As Britain prepares for an unprecedented outpouring of national grief at Princess Diana's funeral, seven photographers may face trial in Paris on charges of manslaughter

A French magistrate has formally opened a manslaughter inquiry — the equivalent in France of filing charges — *against six* photographers and a motorcycle driver in connection with the death last Sunday in a Paris car crash of Diana, Princess of Wales, her companion, Emad Al-Fayed, and their driver, Henri Paul.

The six photographers and the motorcyclist were arrested at the scene of the accident early Sunday and questioned concerning their roles in the high-speed car chase that ended in tragedy. The seven are facing trial on charges of "involuntary homicide" and of "failing to assist a person in danger" — a criminal offence in France. Each charge carries a maximum five-year prison term and a fine of up to 500,000 francs [$83,000].

One of the seven accused, Romuald Rat, who was among the first to arrive on the scene, told the investigating magistrate that he took Diana's pulse to see if she was dead, but denied claims by witnesses that he moved Diana's body.

Rat and Christian Martinez were released on bail of 100,000 francs [$16,000], and were barred from leaving French territory and from working as photographers. The other five were freed unconditionally.

Meanwhile another photographer, Jacques Langevin, who works for Sygma, is said to have been wrongly arrested after coming across the crash scene "on the way home."

"He has never taken part in such chases," said his boss, Hubert Henrotte. "He has nothing to do with the paparazzi. *It was a full seven* minutes later when he arrived at the scene of the accident. The police were already there. Like the good professional he is, he took pictures of the emergency services and of the damaged vehicle, and for that he was arrested."

A lawyer for the photographers responded to the news, accusing the French authorities of using his clients as scapegoats and mounting a "legal spectacle" simply in order to appease public opinion.

But a police report quoted by RTL radio confirmed that some of the photographers had resisted policemen who were trying to keep them away from the car. "They kept on taking pictures, obstructing a policeman who was trying to *rescue the victims," the report* said.

The key witness and only survivor of the crash, bodyguard Trevor Rees-Jones, was severely hurt, sustaining serious facial injuries, and is likely to need many weeks' convalescence before he is able to speak to investigators.

Lawyers for the Al-Fayed family and the driver, Henri Paul, who was found to have more than three times the legal limit of alcohol in his blood, said they planned to file civil suits in the case, seeking damages.

Paris lawyer Bernard Dartevelle, who represents the Al-*Fayed family, insisted that the* paparazzi photographers were responsible for the crash. If the photographers had not started the chase, "it is highly probable that the driver would not have been travelling at excessive speed," he said.

Jack Firestone, a New Yorker who was in Paris on vacation and had been returning to his hotel when his taxi happened upon the scene five minutes after the crash, said the photographers were swarming round the wreckage "as if they were mosquitoes...taking photos from every conceivable angle. There was no sign of one hu*man being trying to help an*other human being in a tragedy."

A private chauffeur who witnessed events at the Ritz Hotel before the fatal journey claimed that the man at the wheel of the car was not in fact a "qualified" driver. According to his version of events, Henri Paul, who was deputy security chief at the Ritz, had gone off duty, only to be called in unexpectedly because a member of the Al-Fayed family had shown up. "He was not a driver," said the chauffer in an interview on the French radio station, Europe 1, during which his *voice was electronically al*tered so as to protect his identity.

"He was called in by the Ritz because Al-Fayed had come. He had drunk a little before that and we knew it. Everyone knew that when he wasn't working, he drank...It was a mistake to have Henri Paul drive the car."

As Buckingham Palace prepared for a "unique funeral for a unique person," to be held in Westminster Abbey on Saturday, Britain struggled to come to terms with an unprecedented tide of intense emotion.

The palace has called for a nationwide minute of silence immediately after the funeral. More than a million mourners are expected to line the route of the pro*cession to the abbey in central* London. The ceremony will be attended by dignitaries from around the world. Those invited to the service include UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, US First Lady Hillary Clinton and Bernadette Chirac, wife of the French President.

British officials said they feared that even the spacious squares and boulevards of London may not be big enough to contain the huge crowds of mourners who are expected at the funeral. Yesterday, three days after her death, grieving admirers continued to line up in their thousands to pay their final respects to the Princess of Wales.

Final rites

Abdallah Abdel-Salam, reporting from London, describes how Arabs living in the British capital received the news of the deaths of Emad Al-Fayed and Princess Diana

"Although Britons were shocked by the death of Princess Diana, we should not forget that two other persons died in the same car crash — Dodi and his driver." This statement by a BBC Television correspondent may have inadvertently summed up the sentiments of the 400,000 Egyptians and other Arabs who live in the UK.

For throughout last Sunday, the British media coverage focused on the death of Diana, the vacuum she left behind and the grief of the British people— almost to the exclusion of everything else. Archive pictures and footage showing "the people's princess", recording her foreign visits and her difficult relationships with the Royal Family and with the press, were screened repeatedly. Experts and commentators talked about the car crash from every imaginable perspective.

"All this is easy to understand," said Ala'a El-Sayed, *an Egyptian residing in London.* "But what is difficult to understand is that there was so little mention of Dodi, who was Diana's friend and companion and who died in the same car crash." El-Sayed added that a television viewer who did not already know the details of the crash would have thought that Diana alone was killed.

Bassam Alloni, a London-based Syrian journalist, was more outspoken. "This is racism," he said. "All day Sunday, the British media coverage was completely biased, ignoring the principles of impartiality and accuracy. For every hour of talking about Diana, Dodi got a minute or even less. Sometimes, he and the driver were referred to anonymously, as 'the others'."

But Mohamed Shaker, the Egyptian ambassador to London, disagreed with this analysis. "Dodi was not ignored. His pictures were all over the television and the newspapers," Shaker said. "Naturally, greater attention had to be devoted to Diana, because she is overwhelmingly popular here — she is unrivaled by any other member of the Royal Family."

Shaker, who was scheduled to return to Cairo on Monday but prolonged his stay in London following the car crash, said: "Dodi was the subject of attention, but within limits. Compared to Diana, he is not very well known to the people. Even if the media coverage focused on Diana on the first day, things returned to normal on the following days."

Asked how he felt personally about the accident, Shaker said: "It is as if I lost my own son. Dodi was good, modest and generous."

Shaker said that he was impressed by the fact that a large number of Muslims who attended Emad's funeral service at London's Islamic Centre did not know Mohamed Al-Fayed, personally, and yet they came to offer their condolences.

Shaker had accompanied Al-Fayed to Gatwick airport last Sunday to be with him for the arrival of his son's body and to help him with the application for permission to proceed with the burial.

For nearly four hours, hundreds of Egyptians, other Arabs and Muslims waited inside and outside the Islamic Centre in Regent's Park for the funeral service to begin. Emad's body arrived around 8 pm and was carried inside by the mourners.

During the prayers, the father appeared distraught. Shuga'a Ali Al-Fayed, a nephew, said his uncle's face turned an intense red and he began muttering incomprehensible words. "The person he lost was his eldest and most beloved son, whom he once described as not only a son, but also a brother and a friend," said Shuga'a. Al-Fayed had been happy for the romance between Dodi and Diana: "He was happy for their happiness."

Dodi was buried at Brookwood Cemetery in *Surrey, southern England. Despite the long dis*tance between the Islamic Centre in north London and Surrey, many people insisted on accompanying the body to its final resting place.

The burial plot had been bought by Al-Fayed that same day. Ambassador Shaker was at Al-Fayed's side throughout this time. Describing these moments, Shaker said: "Al-Fayed showed great patience, but he was extremely sad. He had lost the person he most loved." According to Rifaat El-Gallad, an Islamic Centre official, Al-Fayed wept openly before the prayers at the Centre began.

But commentators outside the *immediate* circle of mourners raised questions that went beyond the ceremonies of grief to the motives underlying certain choices. Ala'a El-Sayed and Bassam Alloni asked why Dodi was not buried in Egypt. They pointed out that, unlike the father, Dodi never sought British nationality but carried Egyptian and United Arab Emirates passports. Two weeks earlier, Michael Cole, a spokesman for the Fayed family, had said that Dodi was proud to be Egyptian and would not be applying for a British passport.

Cole was asked about the impact of Dodi's *death on the father's work. "Things will not re*turn to normal for some time," he replied. "Dodi's demise had left a deep wound in the heart of Mohamed Al-Fayed. But life is bound to go on, and gradually, Mohamed Al-Fayed will resume his activities at Harrods and the other organisations he owns."

Asked why Emad was buried in Britain, Cole said that Britain "is the place Al-Fayed has chosen to spend the rest of his life. His work is in Britain, also his Finnish wife and his children."

Cole said that Al-Fayed was grateful to the ordinary Englishmen and women who had placed *thousands of* bouquets of flowers, bearing such messages as "Farewell, Diana and Dodi," outside Harrods. One of those messages quoted a Quranic verse: "We belong to God, and to God we shall return."



Diana, Princess of Wales, at the tomb of Queen Nefertari in May 1992 *(photo Reuter)*

Blood on their hands?

Public anger still focuses on the paparazzi. **Gamal Nkrumah** finds out what the pressmen have to say in defence of their profession

Princess Diana's brother, Earl Spencer, speaking from his home in Cape Town, South Africa, gave his verdict on the tragedy in which his sister died last Sunday. His statement was curt and indicative of many people's image of the paparazzi. "I always believed the press would kill her in the end," he said. "But not even I could imagine that they would take such a direct hand in her death, as seems to be the case. It would appear that every proprietor and editor, every publication that has paid for intrusive and exploitative photographs of her, encouraging greedy and ruthless individuals to risk everything in pursuit of Diana's image, has blood on his hands."

Earl Spencer's words articulated worldwide anger over the action of the paparazzi. There is no escaping the strong possibility that the lives of the Princess of Wales, Emad Al-Fayed, and their chauffeur may have been cruelly cut short by the chase and because the *paparazzi pestered Princess Diana — in life and even* after death. Eyewitnesses saw photographers taking pictures of the wrecked Mercedes Benz, beofre rescue workers had arrived on the scene.

But there are also counter-claims that a deadly cocktail of speed and alcohol were to blame for Diana's death. Still, Diana died trying to escape the paparazzi's camera lenses. A lawyer for Mohamed Al-Fayed called for the paparazzi to face a manslaughter investigation over the crash that led to the death of his son Emad and the princess.

The chairman of the Egyptian Press Syndicate, Makram Mohamed Ahmed, told *Al-Ahram Weekly* , "Princess Diana made a faux pas when she revealed private details of her personal life in a televised interview which was shown worldwide. She publicly admitted her adultery. From that moment onwards, her life was an open book. Diana set a precedent and thereby encouraged the paparazzi to peer into her private life."

"Where does one draw the line between what is private and what is public when the personality involved is a very public figure?" asked Ahmed. He added that no law can force photographers to leave celebrities in peace: "In France privacy laws are among the strictest in Europe and yet the self-styled Queen of Hearts was chased across Paris by paparazzi on motorcycles. Tougher privacy laws are not the answer. Pressmen must voluntarily accept responsibility and respect people's privacy." Ahmed pointed out, "People directed their anger at the paparazzi's refusal to leave Diana alone, even in death. But the public did not stop buying tabloids as soon as Diana died: in fact sales soared."

"Why blame the press? It is our duty as pressmen to chase after a good story. This is our job and that is how we earn a living. I am surprised at this concerted attack on the media. All accusations against the press will come to nothing," Mustafa Bakri of *Al-Isbou* told the *Weekly*.

Prominent *Al-Ahram* columnist Salama Ahmed Salama told the *Weekly*, "The paparazzi played a key role in the ill-fated accident because they ruthlessly chased the princess across the French capital. This is a fact that we cannot deny. But we must not forget that French police found that blood samples from the driver contained three times the permitted alcohol limit for driving and that explains why the car was travelling so fast and why the crash was so horrendous."

Salama warned that new laws will have to be promulgated to protect the lives of those in the media spotlight from the unwelcome attention of the paparazzi and their obsession with taking intrusive photographs. "The invasion of privacy is unacceptable," he said. "But I doubt very much that Britain will now tighten laws relating to the invasion of privacy. No such law will be binding. What I fear is that undemocratic countries will make this unfortunate incident an excuse to clamp down on the media and limit press freedom," Salama added.

The French daily *Le Figaro* pointed out that not a single picture from the 20 rolls of film confiscated from the photographers showed a helper trying to assist Diana and Dodi. Another French paper, *Liberation*, quoted a police source as saying that two policemen, who arrived at the scene of the accident shortly after it happened, were pushed and shoved by the photographers who allegedly boasted, "We're used to blood. At least in Bosnia they let us work." The revulsion people feel about the media and its unscrupulous quest for profit is unlikely to end when the emotions die down.

"The media is not an innocent party in the death of Diana and Dodi," warned *Al-Ahram*'s Editor-in-Chief Ibrahim Nafie. "A balance must be found between press freedom and the fundamental right to privacy."

Stunned into disbelief

Egyptians reacted to the death of Diana and Emad Al-Fayed with shock and grief but they were divided on whether their untimely demise was the work of fate or unknown conspirators. **Shaden Shehab** gauges the reaction

In the aftermath of the tragic events of last Sunday, the British embassy *in Cairo was inundated* with messages of sympathy and bouquets of flowers brought by Egyptians from all walks of life. Princess Diana was popular in Egypt, as she was throughout the world. Her romance with Emad Al-Fayed and the possibility of a marriage had captured the imagination of many Egyptian romantics. Others, however, had always had doubts that the Di-Dodi romance would survive.

Then came the car crash.

"It is a plot," said Nawal El-Maghrabi, a lawyer. "The car accident was engineered by British intelligence because they could not tolerate the relationship between Diana and Dodi, an Egyptian Muslim." .

Mohamed Nessim, a former Egyptian intelligence officer, seemed to agree: "Such *an accident* is highly unusual. The facts, put together, don't quite add up to a natural occurrence." And he went on to elaborate: "The prospect of Diana marrying an Egyptian was unacceptable to the royal family. After all, everything is possible when the throne is at issue. We know from history that intelligence organisations sometimes act in accordance with what they believe to be the *interests of national* security. There are precedents — accidents whose mystery was never resolved."

However, Nessim cautioned, "We have to wait until the investigation is completed before we can reach a final conclusion."

Mohamed Qotb, an ophthalmologist, thought the royal family would not have liked the princess to marry a Muslim: "It is too bad *Dodi had to die, too.*"

Mohamed Abdel-Wahhab, a teacher, said the car crash was "too much of a coincidence. The criticism levelled at the couple before the accident suggests that there might have been a conspiracy behind it."

Such speculations have been taken very seriously here. While the English still like to idealise their royal family, in order to help them forget about their other troubles, Egyptians have no reason to share their inhibitions. Conspiracy theories are further reinforced, in the absence of any concrete evidence, by the racist overtones which Arabs perceived *in the coverage of the romance in the British press.* Just as they see Mohamed Al-Fayed as a victim of discrimination in the long-running saga that has brought him into conflict with the British establishment, so Emad is easily assumed to have aroused the hostility of his prospective in-laws.

"Dodi was Diana's victim. His involvement with her killed him," said *Hoda Fahmi, an employee of USAID.*

Many Egyptians, however, took a less extravagant view of the matter, seeing the crash simply as an accident, the work of fate. "Let us not blow matters out of proportion. People cannot digest the shock; this is why conspiracy theories emerge; people don't want to believe that fate can be cruel sometimes," said Zohdi Farouk, a civil *servant.*

"It's God's will that they die. I do not believe in any conspiracy. Let them rest in peace," said George Hani, another civil servant.

These divisions running throught public opinion could be discerned in the press too. Anis Mansour, a veteran Egyptian journalist well-known for his fondness for discovering design where others see *only accident*, wrote: "British intelligence assasinated her [Diana] to save the throne, just as Marilyn Monroe was assassinated by American intelligence. Never before, not even during the days of Cromwell, did any one person *manage single-handedly to shake the foun*dations of the royal family." For Mansour, once the Windsors were convinced "that she would marry a Muslim who would give her a son named Mohamed or a girl named Fatma, and the son becomes the brother of the King of England, head of the Church, there had to be a solution. The solution was to dispose of the princess and her *groom. In that way, the royal family's nightmare would be at an* end."

However, another senior Egyptian journalist, Salama Ahmad Salama, took a more moderate line and appealed to common sense. "No matter how marked the animosity between Mohamed El-Fayed and the British royal family, it is out of the question that it could have *prompted a plan to eliminate Dodi in a fashion worthy of Saddam* Hussein," he wrote in *Al-Ahram*.

But common sense is often a luxury princesses and film producers must learn to do without. Faced with such hypotheses and conundrums, some newspapers were perhaps more in tune with their subject in choosing to pay lyric tribute to the love that brought the couple together, rather than speculate on the forces that might have wanted to keep them apart. As one article in *Al-Alam Al-Youm* put it: "Diana and Dodi broke the sound barrier in the past few weeks, annoying many people, and in 20 years perhaps the press will give us answers to the mysterious question of who killed Diana. She was a shining star, and Dodi was a man who got burnt for getting too close to a shooting star."

Businessmen against new regulations

The Investment Guarantees and Incentives Law's executive regulations passed by the cabinet last week face strong reservations from investors and experts in the tourism and cinema sectors. **Gamal Essam El-Din** and **Mona El-Nahhas** report

No sooner had the cabinet passed the executive regulations of the new Guarantees and Incentives Law than investors and experts voiced strong reservations over some of the regulations.

The 47-article law had been roundly criticised in the country's business circles as restrictive and in some aspects, negative. The law provides for major incentives, such as tax exemptions for periods of five to 20 years and protection from sequestration, nationalisation and mandatory pricing systems.

Much of the criticism levelled by businessmen at the law and regulations has been coming from the tourism and cinema sectors.

According to experts of the tourism industry, the regulations' list of incentives does not cover a variety of vital tourist businesses and activities. Fixed and floating hotels, motels, hotel flats and suites are eligible as well as tourist villages and their associated services such as recreational, commercial, cultural and athletic activities and their completion and expansion works.

In order to be eligible for incentives and guarantees, the above-mentioned tourist establishments should not be less than the three-star class and the total space of their sold units should not exceed the total space of their constructed area. The tourism incentives encompass all means of tourist transport, be they land, river, sea or air.

According to Salah El-Taroty, chairman of the People's Assembly Tourism Committee, the extension of tax breaks to hotel expansion works and tourist villages are two positive aspects of the new law. "The fact that the regulations give as much as a 10-year tax break to hotel establishments and their expansion works *and to tourist villages will largely contribute* to promoting tourism investments to dramatic levels. Egypt is destined to be a major tourist spot in the next century and the incentives provided here really help serve this objective," *said El-Taroty.*

El-Taroty also praises the extension of incentives to include such new activities as airport construction, operation and maintenance, and to infrastructure projects in general. "All these projects are an integral part of tourism development and, therefore, it was necessary to provide them with incentives," he argued. El-Taroty, however, strongly criticised the regulations for confining incentives to tourist hotels, motels and villages, in the 3 to 5-star categories. "This will be an obstacle in the way of encouraging mediocre hotels, known as the people's hotels, which form the backbone of internal tourism. This kind of hotel usually attracts average and limited income brackets and plays a basic role in promoting internal tourism," he said. El-Taroty also criticised the regulations for excluding from the list of incentives such vital tourist businesses as general tourist shops and bazaars, tourist companies, yachting and boat marinas, flying ambulance projects and investment hospitals in tourist areas.

According to Mohamed Abdel-Maqsoud, secretary-general of the Red Sea Investors' Association, another negative aspect of the law is that local governorate councils are to be entrusted with receiving investment requests and giving project licences. "Yes, it is true that these councils will have to coordinate with the General Investment Authority (GIA) to facilitate licensing procedures. But it is equally true that these councils are very bureaucratic and could put a lot of obstacles in the way of touristic development in remote areas," he said. GIA Chairman Ibrahim Fawzi recently an*nounced that the GIA will send com*mittees to different governorates to coordinate with local councils on licensing procedures and investment locations.

Another protest came from chains of *fast-food* restaurants. The Association of Fast-Food Investors at the Chamber of Tourist Establishments recently submitted a memorandum to the People's Assembly, complaining of the government's decision to drop the fast food industry from the list of beneficiaries of the incentives provided by the new guarantees and incentives law.

Mahmoud El-Qaissouni, speaking before the Assembly's Tourism Committee, indicated that the new law cancelled a five-year tax break provided to the fast food industry in Egypt by law no.1 of 1973. Reversing this previous position, El-Qaissouni asserted, will negatively affect about 1,200 fast food restaurants that hold international franchises for such names as McDonald's and Kentucky Fried Chicken, and expose them to huge losses. He said the fast food industry in Egypt contributes LE100 million in tax payments to the Egyptian budget each year and employs half a million people while their total investments are close to LE1.5 billion. The result, he added, is that not only a large number of fast food restaurants will be forced to close down, but investors will also be driven to promote their fast food businesses in such Middle Eastern countries as Lebanon, Israel, Dubai and Tunisia where business costs are comparatively low and investment incentives and guarantees are extremely generous.

The regulations have also aroused wide controversy among workers in the film industry.

The clause dealing with the film industry stipulates that cinema companies benefiting from investment incentives *must engage in all aspects of film in*dustry, including production, distribution, shooting, renting or establishing studios, cinema houses and laboratories. The item made it a condition that such activities *should be conducted through a large cin*ema company with a working capital of no less than LE200 million.

Members of the cinema industry are angry at this condition. They issued successive statements expressing their resentment and submitted complaints to the cabinet. Some went further and threatened to stage a sit-in strike in front of the office of the prime minister if the government does not respond to their demands.

While government officials assert that the regulation will help the cinema industry restore its lost vitality, workers in the field view it as leading to the total destruction of the movie industry. According to them, the regulation as it now stands was tailored to serve the interests of certain businessmen who intend to set up new companies. In this connection, film makers warn that such enterprises would amount to a monopoly, thereby discouraging owners of small companies from participating.

Yousef Osman, chairman of the Cinema Artists' Union, calls for abolishing the condition that fixes the minimum working capital for a cinema company to enjoy investment privileges. "I want to know the reason behind determining such a minimum. Instead of putting an end to the crisis of the film industry, the government complicated it further through a condition that is very difficult to meet. None of the existing companies has such a large capital. The majority of these companies have a capital that does not exceed LE15 million each. So, who is going to benefit from the incentives mentioned in the regulation?" he asked. "I think it would have been better if the regulation *did not refer to the cinema industry* at all instead of putting such a mystifying solution," he said.

According to Munib Shafie, head of the Cinema Industry Chamber, the existence *of large capital is a necessity for boosting* the Egyptian cinema industry. "Yet, this should not preclude the existence of small cinema companies, which have the right to enjoy the same facilities. It's unfair to deprive small companies of the facilities and incentives offered to the large ones. In this way, *small producers will keep* away as the competition will not be in their favour," he said. Shafie noted that the Chamber has prepared a memorandum explaining their point of view which they will submit soon to the cabinet.

However, *Shafie believes that amend*ing the regulation is not the only solution. The main issue is that the government should fulfil its promise of saving the movie industry from deterioration. Last year, Prime Minister Kamal El-Ganzouri held an extensive meeting with movie stars, writers, businessmen and others with an interest in the cinema industry to discuss the means of salvaging the industry from decline. "We were extremely happy that the state began paying greater attention to such an important industry," Shafie said.

That gathering called for exempting cinema houses from taxes imposed upon night clubs, reducing fees and taxes on cinema tickets, raising the price of film copyrights, especially those screened in Arab countries and establishing a fund for promoting the film industry. "El-Ganzouri responded favourably to our suggestions. However, official resolutions have not yet been passed," he said.

Film Director Nader Galal expressed his worries that investors who have nothing to do with the cinema industry will apply the principle of profit and loss while dealing with the industry.

Galal has a reservation about the item stating that to benefit from government incentives a company should engage in all facets of the film industry. "It's too *much even for large companies to engage* in all these activities simultaneously. To make profit, the company should do it successively, otherwise it will be subject to losses," he said. Another reservation voiced by Galal is related to the condition fixing the minimum capital of the company. "*I do not think there* is any businessman ready to put a capital of LE200 million in an industry with a work volume of no more than LE40 million annually, assuming that he would take sole charge of the film industry in Egypt," he noted. According to Galal, Egypt produces *about 40 films annually, each film costing* about LE1 million.

Another film director, Dawoud Abdel-Sayed, was at first against the regulation but now speaks in a different tone. "Depending on small companies in the past has led to a state of deterioration in the cinema industry. Small companies cannot afford the costs of making a film which include equipping studios and laboratories, buying film stock and so on. So, I think the government, by issuing the regulation, took the right step at the right time," he said. Sources close to Abdel-Sayed disclosed that *he met last week* with Minister of Cabinet Affairs Talaat Hammad who promised to introduce certain amendments to the regulations.

Naguib Sawiris, one of the businessmen expected to benefit from the new regulation, was quoted as saying that large companies will not monopolise the film industry. "On the contrary, we'll be very happy if owners of small companies decided to join our corporations," he said. Sawiris has already bought 11 cinema houses and begun establishing a joint company, the working capital of which is said to be about LE100 million.

The road to African markets

Egypt is seeking closer economic and political ties with Africa. When Foreign Minister Amr Moussa toured six African states recently, he took along several leading industrialists. **Dina Ezzat** surveys the tour

The recent African tour by the minister of foreign affairs underlined the government's determination to make business a key element of its foreign policy. About 30 businessmen and bankers accompanied Amr Moussa in his tour of Lesotho, South Africa, Mozambique, Zambia, Malawi and Botswana; their aim being to open up new markets for Egyptian exports and explore the prospects for setting up business in these states. Upon his return on Saturday, Moussa sounded pleased with the prospects of his *market-reconnaissance efforts. "It was a* good start and it set the tone for closer economic cooperation"

The six states have varied economic profiles. Their annual per capita income ranges between $600 and $3,000, the highest being that of South Africa.

But all have one thing in common: ample natural resources. The six countries, lumped together, produce 85 per cent of the world's diamond and chrome, 65 per cent of the world's gold and 88 per cent of copper. Their agricultural prospects — all having thousands of acres of uncultivated fertile land — are the stuff of investors' dreams.

Businessmen who have been on the tour speak of "enormous chances" to start farms and factories in these countries. They are already thinking of ways of exporting machinery and agricultural and industrial know-how to these countries. Many of them agree that there is room for major construction projects there.

"These countries really have so much to offer," said Hussein Sabbour, a private contractor and chairman of Al-Mohandis Bank, who participated in the tour. Sabbour is convinced that "*those who want to export have a* market in some of the six states and those who want to establish business there also have an excellent chance".

The remarkable investment opportunities in these countries are not only due to the abundance of natural and human resources. These countries are part of vibrant economic groups, such as the Community of Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) and the Organisation of Southern African Development Cooperation (SADC). The two groups — comprising 27 members of sub-Saharan *Africa's 39 countries — were formed in the* early 90s and aim to boost economic cooperation among the member states through preferential treatment and the coordination of economic policies.

Some of the six states included in the tour offer incentives to all foreign investors. Botswana, for example, offers major investors cheap land and tax exemptions. If the investors launch projects involving training of local labour, the government picks up 80 per cent of the wage bills in the project's first two years. Magdi Abu Samra, chairman of Agroland Company for Agricultural Projects was pleased with the prospects. "One could have large vegetable or fruit fields in one of the poorer countries, where fertile soil and cheap labour are abundant, and begin exporting, without paying any customs, to nearby countries who are members of the COMESA," he said.

Other businessmen were equally enthusiastic about setting up business in these countries. "Having a base there would make it easier (to invest) and cheaper," said Sabbour.

But the road to the markets of the south is *not yet paved. The remoteness of these coun*tries is one major concern for Egyptian exporters. "It is not only very far but also there are not enough airlines or shipping facilities connecting Cairo with these capitals in the south," said Khaled Nosseir, vice chairman of Alkan for Exports, Imports and Industries.

Nosseir noted that airlines and shipping companies maintain that they cannot expand their operations until exports increase to a level which would make business economically feasible. This is a catch-22, because exporters are unable to boost exports unless *appropriate shipping facilities are in place.* This is where the helping hand of governments is needed. Businessmen want the governments involved to provide enough incentives for the transport companies and the exporters to make them meet halfway.

The unstable nature of emerging African economies is a major concern for businessmen. "I cannot send commodities worth millions of dollars to a country and then lose my money just because the importing side, or the government, could not pay," Nosseir said.

Contractors are also hesitant to engage in any major infrastructure projects, such as the construction of roads and ports, in another country unless payment is guaranteed. Businessmen suggest that at this stage the African Bank for Imports and Exports should play a more active role in providing letters of credit to investors who are seeking economic cooperation with these developing economies.

If these problems are ironed out by the governments concerned, Egyptian businessmen said, all other problems could be taken care of. But they all agree that further market *research is needed prior to any investment* commitment in these countries and urge Egyptian diplomatic missions to get more involved in the process, a request which the diplomats promised to meet.

"The [Egyptian] embassies will always be ready to provide any possible help," said Moushira Khattab, Egypt's ambassador to South Africa. "We can always provide necessary information, and put the interested businessmen in touch with the concerned officials."

The high-profile cooperation between the *business community and the foreign min*istry seems promising. "The fact that the minister was there helped us arrange meetings between Egyptian businessmen on one hand and leading African officials and businessmen who could be potential partners on the other," Khattab said.

A few business deals were made during the visit, but right now most businessmen who took part in the tour are busy writing reports about their initial impressions, expectations and concerns. The reports will be submitted to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs which would follow up the issues raised in these reports with the concerned official bodies in these countries. Copies of the reports will be made available to other businessmen who were not on the tour.

Cairo is set on expanding its volume of trade with Africa. "This market is the future for Egyptian businessmen," Minister Moussa said. Egyptian businessmen are unanimous that the potential for increased trade is considerable. In an effort to realise this goal Egypt applied for membership of the COMESA. "While in Zambia, Minister Moussa discussed with Frederick Chiluba, the pres*ident of Zambia who is currently chairing* the COMESA," said Mohamed Nossrat, head of the Foreign Ministry's Southern African Desk. "We are getting positive reactions and we hope (to complete) by next year the procedures for this membership," he added.

Last April, Moussa headed another delegation of businessmen to a number of eastern Africa states. Since then, Egyptian businessmen have signed agreements worth $450 million with Uganda. Moreover, the Banque du Caire, in cooperation with a group of independent investors set up a bank in Kenya. *Sources at the Foreign Ministry expect more* investment to follow.

The minister of foreign affairs is planning to take a few businessmen to West Africa in the near future and North Africa is also on the agenda. "We should never think that the market there is completely covered by the Europeans," Minister Moussa said.

Facilitating this economic cooperation are the good ties between Egypt and its African neighbours. Diplomats hope that if Egypt manages to boost its economic ties with African neighbours it would be able to rally them into some form of political cooperation that would benefit the entire continent.

In his meeting with the South Africa President Nelson Mandela, Moussa was eager to coordinate political views. The two men discussed the issue of the expansion of the Security Council and voiced support of rotation for the African seat they hope will be added, sans veto, to the permanent seats of that council. Political understanding, Egyptians diplomats say, is crucial to the smooth cooperation between the two leading African nations. As one diplomat put it: "It is obvious that politics and economy go hand in hand; if *you fix one you will have fixed the other.*"

Come and invest!

*ORGANISERS of a confer*ence entitled 'Euromoney', due to be held in Cairo on September 9 and 10, say it is expected to draw a large number of international investors interested in projects the government has designated for private sector financing.

The conference, which is co-hosted by the Egyptian government and the international magazine *Euromoney*, will focus on the Egyptian capital market's developments as well as opportunities for project and infrastructure finance. Sponsors say that the conference will be an excellent opportunity for international organisations and individual investors, who are lining up to invest in Egyptian equities, to meet with key government officials and domestic as well as international financial and business circles.

Suez bridge

THE JAPANESE government is contributing over LE300 million in grant aid towards the construction of a bridge across the Suez Canal which will link the Sinai Peninsula with the rest of Egypt.

The announcement of the planned construction of Al-Firdan Bridge was made last week after an agreement was signed by Zafer El-Bishry, Egyptian minister of state for planning and international cooperation, and Mitsuo Sakaba, chargé d'affaires of the Japanese Embassy in Cairo.

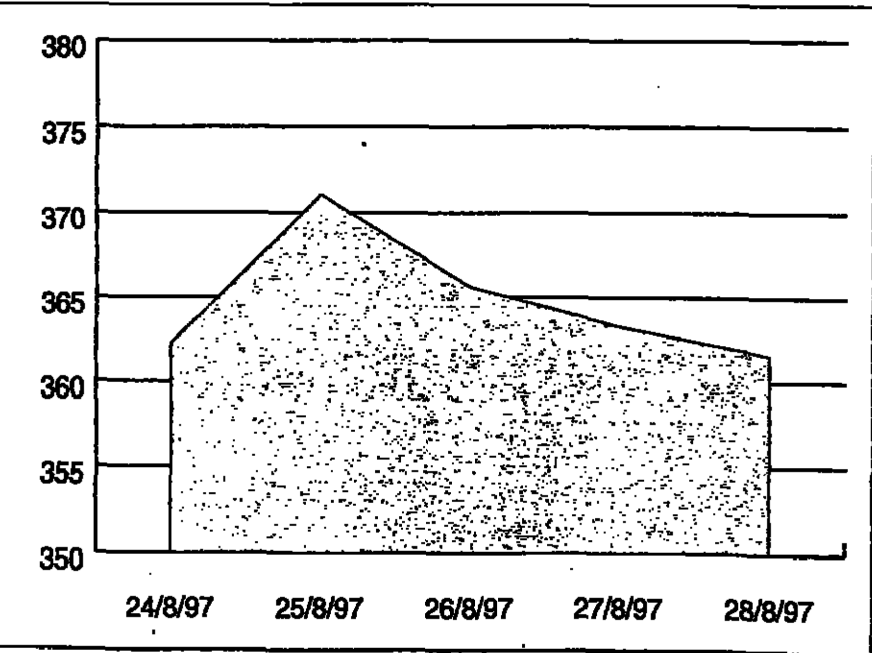
The agreement stipulates that the Japanese government will undertake the construction of the body of the main bridge and the approach viaducts on each side above a height of 49.5 meters. The bridge is expected to rise 70 meters above the canal and will not obstruct traffic in the waterway. The total cost of the bridge is expected to exceed LE500 million.

The bridge will facilitate the goals of the National Project for the Development of Sinai which seeks to develop the peninsula by the year 2017, attract a population of 3.2 million to the area and create 800,000 jobs.

It is forecast that traffic crossing the Suez Canal to Sinai will reach 60,000 vehicles per day by 2017, far exceeding the present 22,000 *vehicles per day*, most of which use the Ahmed Hamdi Tunnel under the canal just north of Suez City. The bridge will, therefore, be essential to cope with the additional traffic. The bridge will replace the present ferry boat system which has limited capacity and sustainability.

Market report

Market turn-up



THE GENERAL Market Index continued its four-week long recovery through the week ending August 28. Recording its highest increase in the last 6 months, it went up by 12.75 points to 361.54. The overall market turnover also climbed to LE450.7 million from LE350 million in the previous week.

The Egyptian Financial and Industrial Company topped the market in terms of the value of traded shares, with LE63.9 million worth of its shares changing hands during the week, equal to 14.18 per cent of the total value of transactions. Shares of the Commercial International Bank (CIB) were also in heavy trading, accounting for 9.06 per cent of the total number of shares traded during the week

Of the 131 GMI-listed companies, the shares of 84 went up, the shares of 22 companies dropped and those of 25 companies remained unchanged. The Engineering and Architectural Industries was the week's best performer. Its shares gained 23 per cent, ending the week at LE9.09.

Bonds had an unexciting week, with total transactions at 2.37 per cent of the market activity. The *housing bond 89/2004*, dipping by 9.64 per cent to LE75, was the week's worst performing bond.

Edited by **Ghada Ragab**

Al-Ahram: A *Diwan* of contemporary life

1 9 7

The government of Prime Minister Mustafa Fahmy Pasha held office for exactly 13 years spanning the 19th and 20th centuries. It was the longest-lived cabinet in Egypt's modern history and was known for its subservience to the British, who had occupied the country in 1882. Fahmy's cabinet was succeeded in 1908 by one headed by Butros Ghali Pasha, a Coptic Christian whose appointment was without precedent. And, unlike previous cabinets which were dominated by ministers of Turkish extraction, Ghali's administration consisted entirely of home-bred Egyptians. Our *Diwan* chronicler, **Dr Yunan Labib Rizk**, tells the story of the government switch from reports published by *Al-Ahram*



Prime Minister Mustafa Fahmy's cabinet, in office from 12 November 1895 to 11 November 1908, was the longest lasting government in modern Egyptian history. Egyptians at the time had come to believe that they would never see its term come to an end.

Only eight months prior to the fall of that government, *Al-Ahram* published a sarcastic article depicting the popular sense of frustration. In "The cabinet crisis: a fictional interview", the author imagined what each minister might answer were they posed the question as to whether they might consider resigning in the event of a cabinet crisis. Five members of the cabinet thus interviewed found pretexts for staying on. One minister was evasive.

In spite of the impatience of the Egyptian people, there were several reasons why this Fahmy government was so long-lived. Firstly, it represented the long-standing stand-off between the Khedive Abbas II and the British High Commissioner Lord Cromer. Early in his reign, in an attempt to assert himself, Abbas dismissed the first Fahmy cabinet in 1893. There ensued a turbulent period that saw the rapid succession of two other governments, the first under Riyad and the second under Nubar. However when antagonisms flared up between Nubar and the khedive, the khedive yielded and brought back Fahmy to form another cabinet.

Secondly, Fahmy was clearly favoured by the British. Fahmy was a close friend of Cromer, to the extent that he was sometimes referred to in the nationalist press as "Sir." Cromer certainly spared him no praise in his farewell speech in 1907. And, on the occasion of Fahmy's departure from the ministry, Eldon Gorst, Cromer's successor, wrote to his government, "I cannot close this dispatch without placing on record the immense services which Mustafa Pasha Fahmy has rendered during the 13 years which have elapsed since his last ministry was formed, both to his own country and to Great Britain."

Certainly it was felt that the Fahmy ministry helped the British secure their grip over the administration of the country. *Al-Ahram* remarked, "These ministers who took office on 12 November 1895 have ossified in their seats. They do little more than countersign the documents that are handed to them by the British ministerial advisers. They do as they are bid and never take an initiative on their own. The government would lose nothing if it were to replace them by machines that affix official seals automatically."

With Cromer's departure from Egypt and his replacement by Eldon Gorst circumstances would change for the ministry. After the period of "rupture" that characterised the relationship between the two centres of power in the country, Abdin Palace, the seat of the khedive, and Dubara Palace, headquarters of the high commissioner, they entered a period of entente. A major factor pushing toward this entente was the Egyptian nationalist movement which continued to gain momentum even after the death of Mustafa Kamel. Both the khedive and the occupation authorities began to feel that the old sedatives were no longer sufficient to contain it. They now required stronger policies and, therefore, a new cabinet powerful enough to carry them out.

Moreover, the Fahmy cabinet had become more of a burden to the British than an asset. It is sufficient to read the article which appeared in *Al-Ahram* of 11 November 1908. The article opens, "This cabinet, whose ministers have been bent upon dying in their seats has taken every possible action that can arouse the condemnation of the people. For 13 years they have not budged from their chairs, that is, until today when Eldon Gorst came to shake them up and topple them. We do not think he will have to exert too much effort to do so since this ministry is already on the verge of collapse and the people are crying out for its fall. The newspapers call for its fall and the ministry itself seems to be begging to fall now that it has become so decrepit."

By May 1907 it appeared that the fall of the Fahmy government was inevitable and that it was just a question of the exact timing. On 6 May *Al-Ahram* predicted that "the ministry will change after the summer holidays." It took slightly longer than anticipated, but that did not prevent people from airing their views. On 23 October *Al-Ahram* published a letter from one of its readers who signed himself "A peasant in a *za'but* (a course woolen garment)," suggesting that in forming a new ministry, authorities should depart from the custom of choosing bureaucrats and graduates from the higher academies who are closely connected to foreign circles. Instead, they should choose "those who have never left Egypt or have only rarely ventured off its coasts. If we had a ministry made up of individuals such as the late Sheikh Mohamed Abduh and the late mayor Al-Sufani Bek we would have an industrious and effective ministry that would ensure public safety, uphold the rights of the country and create in their ministries hives of activity rather than simply a jumble of desks and chairs."

On 10 November Gorst met with Abbas in Qubba Palace. Shortly afterwards Abbas held a 40-minute meeting with Fahmy. When the newspapers got wind of the meetings, "their correspondents crowded around the palace and then raced around the city to discover what took place. In sum they learned that nothing really happened since the prime minister had not tendered his resignation in writing. Some suggest that by not submitting a written resignation Fahmy hoped to spare the other ministers. If he had entertained such hopes, they were in vain for clearly Abbas considered the prime minister's oral notice to comprise the resignation of the entire cabinet, a fact that was confirmed on 11 November 1907.

With the passing of the longest-lived ministry in Egyptian history, preparations got under way to welcome the new one. There were nevertheless a few surprises in store. The first involved the rivalry between Hussein Fakhri and Butros Ghali, respectively minister of public works and minister of foreign affairs in the outgoing government. The former had in his favour the fact that he had previously been prime minister in 1893. That the ministry he headed lasted only three days was the result of the friction between Abbas and Cromer, who insisted on dismissing this ministry so that he could exercise his prerogative of selecting ministers. Also in Fakhri's favour was the fact that he belonged to the ruling Turkish aristocracy which had supplied most of the members of successive Egyptian ministries. Butros Ghali, on the other hand, had to his credit an uninterrupted 15-year ministerial career. He had been finance minister in 1893-4 and foreign minister ever since. Not only was he was widely respected for his expertise but throughout both the period of "rupture" between the royal palace and the British as well as the period of entente Ghali had managed to remain on good terms with both sides.

Although, according to *Al-Ahram*, the contest between the two candidates had the corridors of power divided into two camps, it was resolved in a meeting between Abbas and Gorst on 10 November. In a dispatch to London on this meeting, Gorst wrote, "Fakhri Pasha, the minister of public works and Butros Pasha Ghali, the minister of foreign affairs, are the two most suited to succeed Mustafa Fahmy Pasha. Although the latter is the most qualified in all respects, the major obstacle to his selection is the fact that he is a Christian. I expressed this reservation to the khedive, although he did not share my opinion."

In fact, it was Abbas' opinion that Ghali would have greater popularity as prime minister than Fakhri. Ghali was thoroughly Egyptian while Fakhri belonged to the Turkish upper classes. It may also be that Abbas wished to exercise his authority to select his government, the opportunity for which had been denied him since 1893. In all events, Gorst accepted the khedive's opinion. The khedive, he wrote to his superiors, was more capable than he in judging the sentiments of Egyptian Muslims and in all other respects "the British government does not doubt his ability to implement its policies in the country."

It was thus that on 12 November 1908, the khedive promulgated "the royal decree assigning the position of prime minister to the honourable Butros Ghali Pasha." But, again, the selection of the new cabinet would be met with raised eyebrows. In the past, it had been customary in ministry reshuffles that most of the previous ministers would be reappointed to the new ministry. On this occasion, however, with the exception of Ghali, of course, all the other members of the cabinet were new faces, with one other notable exception: Saad Zaghlul.

According to the memoirs of the palace confidant, Ahmed Shafiq, Gorst, in his meeting with the khedive had expressed his reservations about Saad Zaghlul and said, "He is arrogant and sharp-tongued. But if he were to leave with the others he might do something to harm us. Therefore, if the khedive has no objections that he remain in the ministry for two or three months, we might then find a way to oust him." The khedive is reported to have answered, "Butros Pasha told me that if the British asked that Saad remain, leave him to me and I'll know how to get rid of him."

As for the remaining members of the new ministry, *Al-Ahram* was keen to stress the fact that the majority were Egyptian in origin, an unprecedented event in the history of Egyptian governments. In addition to Butros Ghali and Saad Zaghlul, there was Hishmat Pasha, the new minister of finance, Ismail Pasha Sirri, who was appointed minister of public works, and Mohamed Said Bek, the new minister of interior.

Still, the appointment of Butros Ghali as prime minister did provoke controversy. *Al-Ahram* was quick to defend him. It wrote, "His Royal Highness the khedive has appointed Butros Pasha Ghali, a Coptic Christian, as prime minister and in making this judicious appointment he has refuted all those who accuse our nation of bigotry and disunitiy." Also, addressing the Islamic press, the newspaper wrote, "The opportunity now presents itself to you, dear colleagues, to greet this appointment with the appropriate interpretation. Take the name Butros Pasha Ghali as prime minister of your government as a weapon to wield against the fabrications and illusions of your adversaries."

Unfortunately, Nationalist Party circles were not so easily convinced. Mohamed Hasib, one of the party leaders, wrote that the occupation authorities' appointment of Butros Ghali was intended to cause dissension in the nation. The Nationalist Party "is founded on the principle of equality and brotherhood among the individuals of the Egyptian nation. It accepts as its members all who are sincere in their patriotism, without discrimination with regard to religion." However, he continues, "the party objects to the appointment of Butros Ghali for other reasons. True patriotic sentiments would have demanded that he resign from the ministry the day he was asked to sign the (1899) agreement stripping Egypt of the Sudan. He also signed the ruling against the defendants in the Dinishaway incident, a ruling which injured the national sentiment and revealed his corruption to the world."

Al-Ahram could only comment mysteriously, "Most people have worn themselves out in trying to learn the opinion of the Nationalist Party." Ghali was assassinated by one of the Nationalist Party members less than two years after he took office.

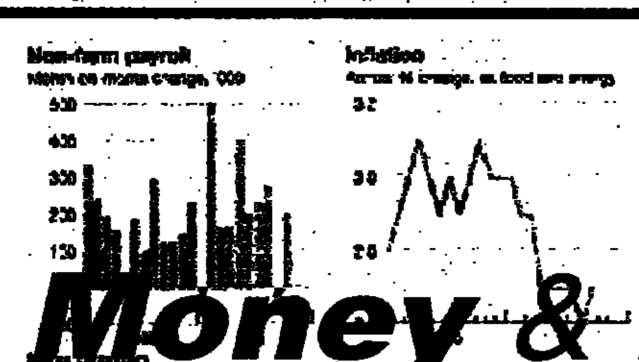


The author is a professor of history and head of Al-Ahram History Studies Centre.

Tainted food refused

DR AHMED Guweili, minister of home trade and food supply, stated that all imported meat arriving since the first of January has been inspected and that meat from Belgium has been banned because of a possible fraud in the shipment's certificates of origin. In addition, 142 tons of imported meat arrived in Alexandria and were found to be unsafe for human consumption.

Guweili explained that inspection methods have advanced greatly as of late.



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IBM Training Centres are pleased to announce that new authorised training will take place through Oracle, in an unprecedented cooperation between the two countries.

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6th Artificial Intelligence Conference to be held in conjunction with ACITEX '96

DR AHMED Ebada Sarhan, chairman of the International Artificial Intelligence Conference, said preparations are under way for the conference, organised by the Egyptian Computer Society, the American University in Cairo, AMAC and the British Computer Association.

Mr Ali Ghoneim, vice-chairman of Al-Ahram and general manager of AMAC, said the conference will be a unique forum to shed light on the latest research in the field of artificial intelligence.

The conference's timing will also coincide with that of the Al-Ahram Computer Exhibition, ACITEX, from 18-21 October 1997.

Many participants are expected this year, along with representatives from international computer exhibitions from Germany and elsewhere, vying with each other for a place in this important exhibition.



Ahmed Ebada Sarhan

To increase the number of companies and sponsors this year, the exhibition will be held at the Cairo International Conference Centre, with its large floorspace and wings that are sure to be able to accommodate exhibitors and sponsors while allowing for full freedom of movement.

Exhibition space is available at easy-term payments until 1 October 1997. For more information and reservations, telephone 3391071 or fax 3941866.

Bahrain exhibition opens window of opportunity

ALL ECONOMIC indicators point towards the continued growth of commercial relations between Egypt and Bahrain, which shines with its unique geographic position as an outstanding trade centre in the Gulf.

The recent period has witnessed the success of the Egyptian economic reform policy and the Infitah, along with the flourishing of Egyptian industry within new industrial cities and industrial free zones. With this has come a marked increase in trade between Egypt and Bahrain, which Egyptian businessmen and economic observers have been taking an increased interest in developing. Bahrain has also become a window of opportunity for countries interested in exporting to Gulf countries, especially after the construction of the King Fahd Bridge which links Bahrain with Saudi Arabia, thus providing a crossing-point to all markets in the Gulf area.

Bahraini Trade Minister Ali Salih Al-Salih expressed his readiness to provide all facilities for the success of the Egyptian Products Exhibition, which will be held at the Bahrain International Exhibition Centre from 13-20 October. He indicated that this exhibition will give an opportunity to businessmen from both countries to discuss increasing commercial exchange and embark on joint venture projects.

Al-Salih met with Mr. Medhat Mansour, general manager of Pyramids Advertising Agency, to discuss matters concerning the final preparations of the exhibition. Also present at the meeting was the Egyptian ambassador to Bahrain, Mr. Mahmoud Esmat.

Al-Salih explained that Bahrain considers exhibitions one of the prime tools for marketing and boosting commercial ties among Arab countries, and one of the best means to guarantee growth and development in all fields.

Mansour explained that the products at the exhibition will be of the highest standard, and will reflect the gains made in Egyptian industrial development, due to the Egyptian government urging companies to increase product quality to place them in a more competitive light within international exhibitions. He also explained that Pyramids Advertising Agency will exert every effort possible to ensure the success of the exhibition.

Companies invited to the exhibition come from a wide range of sectors, including those operating in the fields of real estate, tourism, banks, ready-made clothes, carpets, engineering industries, electrical and electronic equipment, chemical industries, building and construction materials, cosmetics, furniture, leather products, household appliances, handicrafts and gifts.

Also attending the meeting between Al-Salih and Mansour were Sheikh Daej Ibn Salman Al Khalifa, second undersecretary at the Ministry of Foreign Trade, Mr. Ahmed Al-Shamlan, general manager of the Bahrain International Exhibition Centre, and assistant manager Mr. Kazem Al-Sayid.

Mansour explained that Egyptian products have excellent chances of success in Bahrain in light of recent decisions taken to encourage exports and raise the level of production, both in quality and quantity. It is expected that the exhibition will lead to an increase in contracts and direct sales.

For more information and reservations:
Cairo (Fax and direct): 5785889
Tel: 5786100/200/300
Alexandria:
Tel: 03-4834000/ 03-4848271

Al-Ahram Weekly

Africa revisited

The aims of Foreign Minister Amr Moussa's tour of southern Africa were three-fold. Three issues dominated discussions during Moussa's visit — one was economic and the other two political. The first was finding new ways of increasing economic ties with sub-Saharan Africa's most prosperous region. SADC. and lobbying support for Egypt to join COMESA. The second was finding out what South Africa feels about a permanent seat or two for Africa at the *United Nations Security Council*. The third concerns President Nelson Mandela's efforts to find a lasting solution to the civil war in Sudan.

The three issues are of vital importance to Egyptian national security. The world is now grouped into giant economic blocs. Egypt is working on two fronts: it is trying to revive plans to launch the long-awaited Arab common market, and to revamp the idea of an African common market. The two markets are not mutually exclusive.

A permanent seat for Africa at the UN Security Council is an issue that has *unleashed unwelcome political and diplomatic* jitters in many quarters. The big question is who will represent Africa at the Security Council — Nigeria, Africa's most populous nation; South Africa, the continent's richest country; or Egypt. The importance to Egypt of Sudan and the River Nile basin goes without saying.

The timing of Moussa's southern African tour was important. It came a few months after Moussa's East African tour, and coincided with the meeting of Sudanese leaders, both government and opposition in South Africa to discuss the prospects of peace in Sudan.

Egyptian diplomacy has long upheld the principle of non-interference in the domestic affairs of sovereign African nations. But as we live in the age of region cooperation, Moussa's visit was an exemplary model of just that.

Al-Ahram Weekly

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Rethinking Iran

A common history, and shared interests: Hassan Hanafi wonders if the Arabs can place their relations with revolutionary Iran on a new footing, free from stereotypes and mutual suspicion

Honesty is necessary, even when it involves the most sensitive issues and affects our very identity. Yet it is avoided by *intellectuals and leaders alike*. People tend not to speak their minds, although they have very clear ideas of their opinions. Gradually, honesty has become a cultural taboo, just like religion, politics and sex — the prohibited trinity in Arab culture. Arab intellectuals must speak out and say what they think; silence, in this case, is not golden. If we remain silent, we will be crushed by events or base our vision of ourselves on the analyses developed *in the West*. This will lead us to perceive our own reality and interests, to understand our present and future, through lenses made by others to their own benefit.

The issue of Arab-Iranian relations is especially sensitive — more so than, say, relations with Turkey, the West, Africa, Asia or even Israel. The rulers perceive Iran as the greatest threat to the regimes in power, while intellectuals, except in rare cases, do not mention it.

Iran has shared the Arabs' history and geography since pre-Islamic times. Arabs on their way to India, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Turkey and central Asia passed through Iran, sometimes stopping there for years. Before the rise of Islam, trade, cultural and social relations flourished between the Arabs and the Persians. Iranians were among the most loyal followers of the Prophet Mohamed, like Salman Al-Farisi. The Arabic language contains many loan-words from Farsi, and the opposite is also true. The prophet himself is said to have praised Persia in such sayings as "Knowledge is in Persia" and "No matter how great the distance to knowledge, the people of Persia will attain it."

Persian political culture has influenced *Islamic culture as a whole through translation*. Persia provided a channel through which Greek culture reached the Muslims; Sufism is said to have Persian roots, while some of the most renowned narrators of the prophetic traditions were Persian, as were many mathematicians, natural scientists, and philosophers.

Apart from the long history it shares with the Arabs, like the Arab world, Iran was *subjected to Western domination*. Only the Arabs' struggle against Western imperialism, and especially the Arab-Israeli wars, led to the emergence of certain contradictions. The Shah's nationalist policies and the emphasis placed on Iranian specificity served to confront the threat inherent in Arab nationalism and its potentially liberating message. Iran formed a Western alliance with Pakistan and Turkey to the same ends. The Shah supported the Iraqi Kurds and encouraged their separatist aspirations in a bid to weaken Iraq. Arab nationalists backed the nationalist movement of Iran, supported Mosadegh and encouraged national and Islamic opposition to the Shah. Nasser helped arm both the Mujahid-i-Khalq and the Fida-i-Khalq.

The Iranian revolution and its success in overthrowing the Shah further sparked the spirit of Arab nationalism, at a time when the Arab regimes had already recognised Israel, cooperated with the West, established market economies and pushed privatisation programmes ahead. Iran recognised the Palestinian Liberation Organisation, closed down the Israeli Embassy established under the Shah, and handed it over to PLO.

Internal and external factors, however, affected national unity, caused rifts between *Islamists and secularists, and led to the* domination of traditional Islamic institutions and the punishment of opponents of the revolution. This led the opposition to gather in exile. The United States' aggression, the war with Iraq, and the Arab regimes' fear that Iran would sponsor revolutions all contributed to the transformation of the revolution and an increase in its conservative tendencies.

The dispute over islands in the Gulf led the Arabs to believe that Iran was becoming a regional power seeking to extend its borders into the Arab world. The war with Iraq was widely perceived as interference in Arab affairs. The revolution's accession to statehood, its spiritual and material support for Islamist movements within the Arab world, mean that it poses a danger to the Arab regimes at a time when modernisation ideologies — secularism, nationalism and Marxism — have been weakened. The presence of large numbers of Shi'ites in southern Iraq and the Gulf increases the threat. Due to the possibility of sectarian loyalties overriding affiliation to the nation-state, Iran is therefore seen as playing a role in all social unrest in the Arab world.

The Arabs must therefore compare between these two images of Iran, understand the historical factors which have produced these two images and recognise the truth within events and political motivations. The Islamic Revolution has remained consistent with the spirit of Nasserism since its inception; its resistance to colonialism and Zionism and opposition to Western influence have been steadfast. It emerged unscathed from the crisis which caused the Muslim Brotherhood to fall out of favour with the revolutionary government in Egypt in 1954 — a struggle which even now prevails between the Islamic groups and the political systems which theoretically inherited the 1952 Revolution and have overthrown in practice. The resistance in southern Lebanon and Palestine is influenced by Iran, while Iranian backing of liberation struggles in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Central Asia, Bosnia and Chechnya qualify it as a central power in the Islamic world. Iran's geographical, historical, social, linguistic, political and cultural influence is also strong in the Gulf. If it does indeed possess nuclear capabilities, it may be a valuable asset to the Arabs, who live in constant fear of an Israeli nuclear attack.

The Arab-Iranian dialogue initiated in Qatar last year was of great benefit to Arab-Iranian relations. Many illusions and stereotypes were dispelled on both sides. The improvement of Arab-Iranian relations, while second to inter-Arab relations, must take precedence over normalisation with Israel.

Ultimately, the Arabs, Turks and Iranians are equal to the total population of Europe, America, Russia and Japan combined. Iran, Turkey and the Arabs represent a central power bloc. Political imagination is the only means by which the Arabs can find a way out of the current crisis. No one is more capable of formulating alternative visions than intellectuals who can speak out frankly without being accused of treason.

The writer is professor of philosophy at Cairo University.

A conspiratorial interpretation of history

In the second article in his series on the problems of history, Mohamed Sid-Ahmed discusses the widespread Arab custom of attributing major historical events to conspiracies

There is a tendency in the Arab world to explain unfavourable historical events in terms of conspiracies. While it is true that strategies *are devised behind locked doors and deals* are struck in secret behind hostile forces, it is wrong to make conspiracies the fundamental element in interpreting history which, implicitly, means that history does not proceed forward according to objective laws.

If it is true that history is governed by conspiracies, it should follow that exposing these conspiracies and neutralising their effect is enough to set the course of history *right. And here we come up against the paradox* that even when conspirators are exposed and neutralised, we will not have removed the reasons for which history is not responding to our wishes. In a way, the conspiracy theory of history is a modern-day version of the medieval practice of crediting sorcerers with the ability to determine the course of events, instead of admitting that events follow objective laws that can *eventually be disclosed*.

We now know that history is governed by laws that can eventually be disclosed.

We now know that history is governed by laws that are much more complicated than previously believed. Conventional wisdom over the last two hundred years was that history proceeds forward with ironclad rigour in a linear development according to some form of 'historical determinism'. A *basic assumption was that linear development* reflected 'progress', i.e., movement from a lower to a higher state, towards a future always seen as brighter than the present. Any zigzags were dismissed as aberrations, exceptions that only confirmed the rule.

As we now know, history is much more complex and the zigzags (what we now call 'non-linearity') are not the exception but the rule. Progress is a puzzling notion that raises more questions than it answers. In *the field of technology for example, the* planned benefits of progress are sometimes overshadowed by its unplanned — and unpredictable — negative side-effects. The notion of 'historical determinism' is now questioned in the light of the breakdown of societies built on central planning and the discredit this has brought to the very idea of social engineering.

Any conspiratorial reading of history is, *by definition, detrimental to peace negotiations*, because the assumption that plots are being hatched runs counter to the promotion of confidence-building measures. That is not to say that conspiracies are always imaginary. For example, it was recently disclosed that Nixon and Kissinger had plotted with Golda Meir to scuttle the Rogers plan! Because of an internal power struggle, the US president was ready to plot *with a foreign head of government against* his own foreign minister.

Conspiratorial theories of history are particularly widespread in the Arab world. The reason is not completely clear. Is it inbuilt in Arab culture, in specificities of Arab history? Is the Machiavelli approach still a predominant factor in the Arab approach to politics? A glaring illustration is the periodic revival of the question of whether Abdel-*Hakim Amer's death in the aftermath of the* 1967 defeat was the result of suicide or assassination. The defeat was so devastating that somebody had to assume responsibility for it. Nasser himself assumed the responsibility first, by resigning on June 9. But massive crowds took to the streets to protest his resignation. Following Nasser's reinstatement in power, responsibility was pinned on Amer, as the high commander of the Egyptian armed forces. At such tragic moments, it is difficult for parties to agree *on how responsibilities should be shared* out. The ferocity of the power struggle sometimes means that the truth remains undisclosed.

Because anti-colonial movements in the Arab world were rendered more complex by the implantation of Israel in its midst, thus imbuing the anti-colonial struggle with a military and not only a popular character, the military acquired a particularly *privileged status in these movements*. The tendency of the military to give discipline and obedience priority over democratic debate coloured political life in many Arab countries, thus encouraging conspiratorial interpretations of undesired political developments. Only democracy can neutralise conspiratorial approaches and ensure that rational thinking takes precedence over interpretations of reality inspired by *frustration, discouragement, and eventually* even despair in particularly difficult situations.

In general, it is not easy to uproot the widespread propagation of conspiratorial theories, which are the theoretical counterpart of terrorist practices. Both are inspired by frustration rather than by hope. Action in both cases is based on individual heroes, not on democratic practices involving the *collective movement of* large masses. *That* is why one can conclude that when terrorism is widespread, it is difficult to assume that conspiratorial interpretations of history can be overcome; and, conversely, when such interpretations have the upper hand, this means that terrorism, as a political weapon, is potentially present and can be resorted to at any time.

Fictional friends

By Naguib Mahfouz

In "Mad Whispers", a collection of my short stories, the heroes of "One Hour To Go", and "Dream of an Hour" — were named Bahaeddin and Hussein Ulama. Many readers have asked me about the Ulama family, and whether these two characters were based on real people, or whether they were entirely the products of my imagination.

Both characters are entirely fictitious. The name Ulama stuck in my mind because, when my family left Gamaliyya and settled in Abbasiyya, I knew a family called Ulama. One of the Ulama boys was a friend of mine during my school years. We frequented the Urabi café in Abbasiyya in the 1930s, when we were in secondary school, and continued to do so even when we entered university. So our acquaintance lasted quite a long time, although I later lost track of him and now I cannot even recall his first name. He must have become involved in some business after graduating, or maybe he emigrated.

The Ulama family was highly respected, and Ulama Pasha was one of the leading members of the Wafd Party at the time. I must say the Ulama family come to my mind more frequently than the young man I remember drinking coffee with so many years ago at the Urabi café.

I never base my characters entirely on any single person I know or have met, but I use traits I have observed in various individuals and blend them into the figures that people my novels. So, while none of my characters can be said to be real in that sense, they do share the reality of all those that constitute them.

Based on an interview with Mohamed Salmawy.

The Press This Week — Privacy vs. publicity

Al-Akhbar: The love story between Diana and Emad El-Fayed had all the ingredients of an exciting journalistic story: royalty, sex, secrecy and religion. And there was much talk about the Egyptian man who the future king of England would address as 'step-father'. Suddenly all dreams were dashed and Diana and Emad have disappeared forever. Now we are left with the issue of how far press photographers and writers should go.
(Mohamed Fahmy, 1 September)

Al-Wafd: Now we come to a difficult question... how did the authorities know that the accident was a result of an attempt to get away from press photographers? *Who stated this? I do not wish to* defend any particular side but Diana, experts say, used to love to be surrounded by photographers and after her divorce she used her "presence" in the media to strengthen her position before the royal family. A spokesman for the El-Fayed family said that Diana and Emad warmly welcomed journalists in St. Tropez. What then happened? That I do not know. In the next few days the world will be seeking answers to these questions and there will be rumours about who stands to benefit from the death of Diana and Emad... Whatever the outcome, the world will remember Diana as an outstanding personality.
(Mohamed Mustafa Sherdy, 1 September)

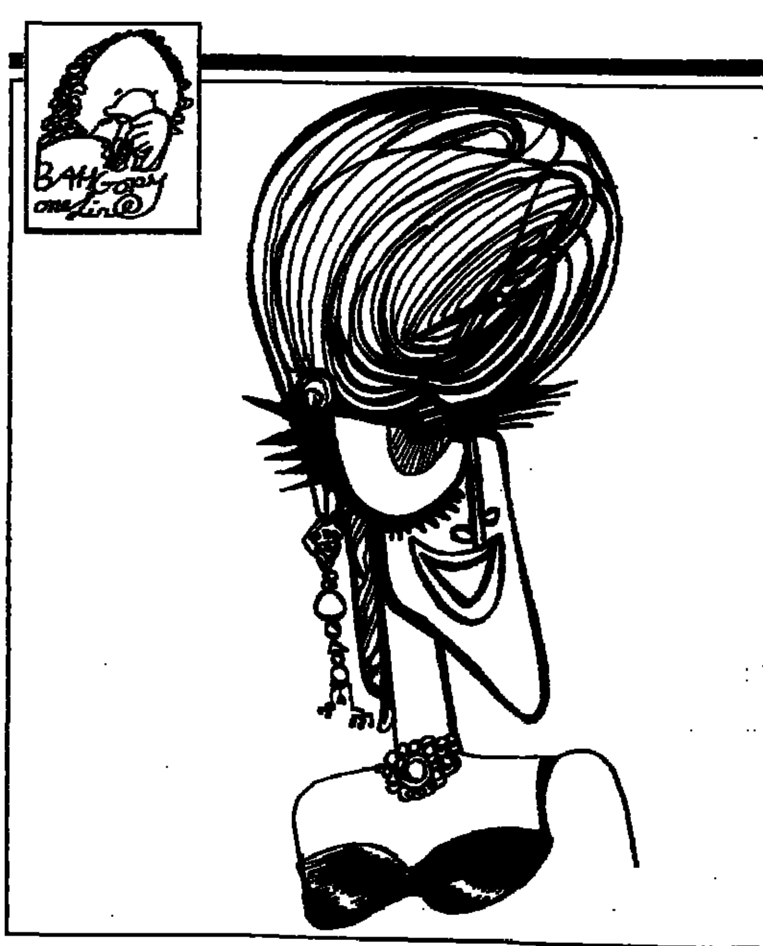
Al-Ahram: It seems that the press is not blameless for the death of Diana and Dodi. The incident will generate a worldwide discussion, among those who take an interest in the press, *on the issue of balancing press freedom with* protecting the privacy of public figures.
The quest of nations to achieve press freedom will not bear fruit until an understanding is reached which would prevent encroaching on the privacy of individuals. The press could be the vehicle which killed Diana and Dodi.
(Ibrahim Nafie, 1 September)

Al-Usbooe: The legend of Diana is over but we are left with difficult questions like who killed her? Had the royal family decided that Diana's love for Dodi would ruin the chances of survival of the royal family and so decided to get rid of her? Did the British secret service fear that the mother of the future king would lie in the arms of a foreigner? Other questions include: what are the limits to press freedom invading on the privacy of citizens? She lived a legendary life and her death was no less spectacular, leaving many questions to be answered.
(Editorial, 1 September)

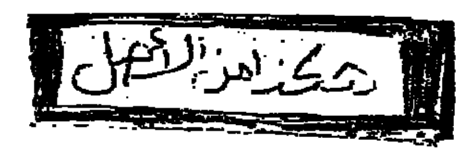
Al-Gomhuria: She is no more. The whole *world followed her adventures and love life with* great interest. Unfortunately the focus was on her love life rather than the public duties she carried out. And Emad Mohamed El-Fayed died in the prime of his life. Such was his destiny. Many will feel sorrow for the deaths despite Diana's scandals, perhaps because death came suddenly and perhaps because both were still young. Some will view the deaths as heavenly justice, voicing anger against a hedonistic style of life.
(Mohamed El-Ezaby, 1 September)

Al-Mussawar: Diana's adventure with Emad brings forth exciting images of cultural differences between Arabs and Europeans which go back nine centuries to the time of the Crusades. It brings to mind orientalist ideas of dark-skinned men and white-skinned women. . . This story is excellent material for the press, touching on sex and money in elite British political circles. . . It also raises the issue of relations with nationals of former British colonies . . . British society cannot forget that Mohamed El-Fayed came from humble origins despite the fact that his present-day fortune exceeds that of Queen Elizabeth.
(Sabry Hafez, 29 August)

Compiled by **Hala Saqr**



The Queen of Hearts, for me, is still beautiful. When I think of Princess Diana, I am dazzled by the memory of her glow: the precious stones she wore, her hair, even her skin sparkled. Her eyes had a dreamy expression, as if she was contemplating something far away, just beyond the horizon. Her jewel-like head — the long neck, high cheekbones, pronounced nose — always belonged in a museum. I forgot the sadness of the accident as I was drawing her. Have her smile and her beauty vanished? They have not. Like Grace Kelly and Marilyn Monroe, the sad princess will live on.



Close up

Salama A. Salama

Freedom or libel

Princess Diana and her friend Emad El-Fayed were killed trying to escape an army of photographers in a wild car chase at insane speeds. Paparazzi had thrived for years on revealing every intimate detail of the princess's life. Some were attached to the tabloid press, which makes its living from salacious tales and the scandals involving the private lives of prominent public figures. Others were free-lance photographers, similar to travelling salesmen, always on the look-out for the scoop of a lifetime.

The romantic tale of the well-loved princess who rebelled against the palace and its protocol has come to a brutal end. Three deaths will continue to trouble public opinion for some time. Two points in particular have aroused controversy. The first is the idea of a conspiracy involving the secret services, who were able to orchestrate the crash, making it look like an accident. The second is whether or not the media has the right to intrude on the private life of a public figures.

The suggestion that Diana was murdered by the British secret service to prevent her from marrying an Arab and inflaming British public opinion if, at some time in the future, he were to become the king's step-father, received considerable credit in Egypt and throughout the Arab world. Conspiracy theories are common currency in the Arab world, where many people have difficulty accepting that accidents such as this one can just happen. Of course, no matter how marked the animosity between Mohamed El-Fayed and the British royal family, it is out of the question that it could have prompted a plan to eliminate Dodi in a fashion worthy of Saddam Hussein. The implausibility of the conspiracy theory is increased by the fact that no wedding plans had been announced.

Whatever the case may be, it would appear that Diana's death is indeed most convenient as far as the palace is concerned. It was, according to many, the only way of putting an end to her colourful love life and her outspoken defiance.

The more important question, however, concerns the right of the press to interfere in the private lives of government officials, royalty or entertainment figures. Will this accident trigger the imposition of severe restrictions on the press, or will a certain margin of freedom allow the media to continue to expose corruption and protect the public from crooks in high places? The law in Britain does not clearly set down the limits to which the press must confine itself. Ever since the tabloids acquired their fascination with the royal family, and placed the British government in a series of sticky situations, a trend had begun to emerge requesting that limits be placed on the freedom of the press. The government soon squashed these demands on the grounds that the law can distinguish between the public's right to information, and the individual's right to privacy. It was supported in this respect by the fact that British law punishes the invasion of privacy.

Rumour has it that Britain may come to apply the far stricter and more specific French laws laying down the limit between freedom of the press and protection of privacy and imposing stringent libel laws.

The recent tragedy has opened up the debate once more. I believe, however, that British public opinion, which tends to avoid the imposition of limitations and additional legislation, will leave these restrictions up to tradition.

In any case, we must remember that no comparison can be made between freedom of the press in Britain and the same freedom in Egypt. All civil liberties remain closely within the framework of the legal, constitutional and political system of any society. It would be unfair to attempt to compare press freedoms in Britain and Egypt, except in the most general sense of the term.





Soapbox

What guarantees?

US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright wanted guarantees that her trip to the Middle East would be successful before she embarked upon it. She will be arriving in the region shortly; has she received those guarantees? Albright had made it clear that pushing forward the peace process in the Middle East does not imply presenting new options. More specifically, it means pushing forward agreed-upon options, while seeking new ways of proceeding after the agreement on the security equation. The question is, does the present Israeli-US plan represent the appropriate option for all parties involved?

Numerous issues are on the agenda: the settlements, security in the Middle East and the Gulf, conditions relating to Iraq, Iran's role in relation to the region, the means of resuming of peace talks on all tracks and Egypt's role.

The list is daunting, but the probability of progress depends on the Israeli government's readiness to honour the agreements made by its predecessor, the Labour Party. Israel's withdrawal from the Golan and adherence to the nuclear non-proliferation treaty are two of the issues on which there can be no compromise.

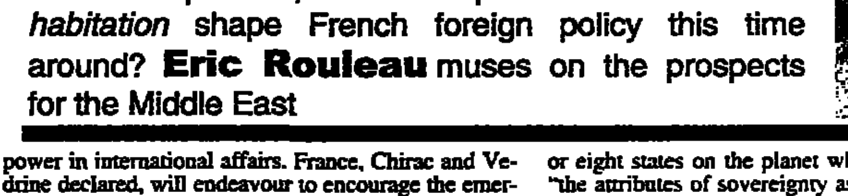


Albright will be either an equitable mediator, ready to discuss new options, or merely Israeli's deputy. She may attempt to impose a solution on the Arabs. This does not mean that the other Arab parties accept it. It only means that the Arabs have certain suspended rights, which they will seek to obtain when circumstances allow it. The occupation of Jerusalem, the settlements, and the violation of peace are clearly breaches of Arab rights.

The writer is an expert on strategy at the Middle East Centre for Strategic Studies.

Ahmed Abdel-Halim

The ambassadors' duties


A Gaullist premier, a socialist president: how will *cohabitation* shape French foreign policy this time around? **Eric Rouleau** muses on the prospects for the Middle East

France has now acquired a foreign policy project. In his speech before parliament when taking office less than three months ago, the new socialist prime minister, Lionel Jospin, had only whetted his audience's appetite. In a text of several thousand words setting down his government's programme, he devoted only a few lines to France's relations with the Third World, falling back on generalities which left his intentions somewhat blurred. It is true that the question had barely been raised during the electoral campaign that swept him to victory — the French, like other peoples, base their vote essentially on domestic political themes — and it is also probable that he had yet to co-ordinate his position with that of the president of the republic, the Gaullist Jacques Chirac, an essential step when the prime minister and the head of the government belong to rival parties.

The gap has now been filled. It appears, judging from the speeches and declarations made by high state officials during the French ambassadors' conference in Paris at the end of August, that French policy is more Gaullist than ever. This statement, it is true, is not surprising when we consider that the line drawn by General de Gaulle in the 1960s was, give or take a few nuances, that of his successors, from Pompidou to Mitterrand. As the opposition, the socialists have often taken stances at variance with those they apply upon arriving in power, particularly in their attitude towards the US and Israel.

The socialist-Gaullist convergence today appears even more clear-cut, thanks to Hubert Vedrine, among others, the minister of foreign affairs, who is probably the best placed to carry out the synthesis and take charge of coordination. At the time when he held high offices at the Elysée Palace, indeed, Vedrine was one of the artisans of successful *cohabitation* between a socialist president (François Mitterrand) and Gaullist heads of government (Chirac and Balladur) in the 1980s and '90s.

In the speeches made by Jacques Chirac and Hubert Vedrine to the French ambassadors, however, one new feature stands out. Beyond the foreign policy they have sketched out, they applied themselves to elaborating France's strategy on the international scene, as well as the philosophy which underpins it.

Moving away from the traditional language of diplomacy — and this is unusual for a "Western camp" country, a member of NATO — both used terms worthy of Third World leaders in the '60s, calling for resistance to the US's "temptation" to exert absolute power in international affairs. France, Chirac and Vedrine declared, will endeavour to encourage the emergence of a "multipolar" world, in order to block the monopoly imposed by Washington since the collapse of the Soviet Union.

With unusual candour, Hubert Vedrine spoke of the "risk of American hegemony", while recommending realism to his audience: whether we like it or not, the US have been the only global superpower since 1991. The collapse of the Soviet Union, globalisation and liberalisation of the economy, the supremacy of the dollar, mastery of communications networks and new technology — all this has given the US extra influence, of which neither the scope nor the dangers must be underestimated. He added: "Adding the Pentagon to Boeing, Coca-Cola, Microsoft, Hollywood, CNN, the Internet, and the English language, we have a virtually unprecedented situation. This must give us food for thought."

Having thus described bluntly the American empire, the head of the diplomatic corps as well as the president invited the French ambassadors to pause again before underestimating either their country's influence on the international scene, or the potential capabilities of France and Europe for resisting American domination. France, Jacques Chirac noted, has a network second only to the US's in diplomacy, and unparalleled in the domain of culture; it is also the fourth exporter of industrial products, the second in agricultural goods, second again in services. Each French citizen exports twice as much as his or her American counterpart, 50 per cent more than each Japanese. For 25 years, France has held on to its share of the global market, while the US, Germany or the UK watched their shares dwindle dramatically. Politically, it exerts considerable influence within the European Community (450 million inhabitants), in Francophone Africa (500 millions) and, of course, in the United Nations, where it is one of the permanent members of the Security Council.

Vedrine's conclusion: France is neither a "hegemonic" nor a "medium-size" power; it is one of the seven or eight states on the planet which continue to enjoy "the attributes of sovereignty as well as the means of implementing a global policy".

After "philosophy" came France's strategy. The main goal is to put an end to the dangerous imbalance caused by the unipolar order, and to "contribute to the inevitable emergence of a harmonious multipolar world" by establishing long-term cooperation with such powers as Russia, China and India, but also with regional African and Latin American regional blocs (nowhere is the Arab world mentioned as a potential power in the foreseeable future).

In order to attain this desirable multipolarity, France will endeavour, first and foremost, to build a political Europe, by endowing it with a strong currency and developing its defensive capacities and its arms industries. Only a politically unified Europe will give France the means of implementing its global policy. France will open up more to the Third World, especially its traditional partners in North Africa and the Middle East. Among the measures to be taken in order to consolidate relations with states of the South, the liberalisations of immigration laws and the increased flexibility of regulations on granting visas figure prominently. The new French government has measured the disastrous consequences of the extremely restrictive policy established by its precedents with respect to foreigners, especially the elites that had been thus alienated from France.

French diplomatic strategy features two other main objectives: to reform NATO in order to obtain improved European representation within its military and political branches: and to establish new rules, "equitable and applicable to all", within international organisations with a view to ensuring that "interdependence does not come to mean incapacity".

The aim here is obviously to prevent Washington from transforming certain multilateral organisations (the UN, the World Trade Organisation, etc.) into the *docile instruments of American policy*.

Confronted with the hegemonic threat, Hubert Vedrine explained in his speech to the French ambassadors, "we will be, in certain cases, the friends or the ally of the United States; in others, when crucial interests are at stake, we will say no... We must tell them all this in the framework of a friendly, frank, true and direct dialogue."

The case of the Arab-Israeli conflict is an especially apt illustration of the French leaders' determination to "say no" to the US. "The peace process is on its deathbed, [the Palestinians'] despair breeds violence and terrorism," said Jacques Chirac, while his foreign minister attributed this stalemate to American passivity. The remedy? Paris has demanded — formally, for the first time — that an end be brought to the US's monopoly and that the peace process be sponsored jointly by the US and Europe — France in particular, "for historical reasons". Jacques Chirac went so far as to state: "France must take the initiative, in cooperation with the United States." At the Quai d'Orsay, no one knows quite what the president meant, or what initiative he had in mind — unless this initiative is being formulated for the trip to the Middle East Hubert Vedrine plans on taking within the next few weeks.

Everything, however, seems to indicate that, in the current situation, whatever the initiative may be, it is doomed to fail, even if the European Union backs it, as Paris hopes. It is not difficult to remember the fate of the European initiative presented on 8 April: the letter to Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, proposing a ten-point plan to be implemented jointly by the US and the European Commission, went unanswered for two months — after which the Europeans received only a terse acknowledgement of receipt. This affront can hardly encourage the EU to make such a vain attempt again, at least not this soon.

Yet the French have not lost sight of the fact that they have their way when they are backed by the Arabs. Their presence on the committee for the supervision of the cease-fire, created in Lebanon after the Israeli attack last spring, was imposed by President Assad, despite the US's and Israel's sharp opposition to any French participation.

The current balance of power, however, will not permit the Arab side to demand that the US share responsibility for the peace process with Europe. A new, drastic deterioration of the situation will no doubt be necessary before Washington accepts to hear what its Arab and European friends have to say — as much in the US's own interest as in that of a lasting peace.

Some call it a change of heart

Is Islamist violence a thing of the past? The recent call for a cease-fire may herald a major change, writes **Diaa Rashwan**

The call for a halt to violence issued by the leaders of Al-Gama'a Al-Islamiya and Al-Jihad groups on 5 July, has elicited a variety of responses.

The initiative means different things. Most important, perhaps, is the result it may achieve by bringing an end to the bloodshed caused by several years of violence between militant Islamic groups and the state in Egypt. It is, however, the implication of substantive change in the nature of these groups and, consequently, in their strategic movements and future development, that is of greater significance here.

The Islamic movement in Egypt, and in the Arab world in general, may be divided into two main distinct theoretical types. The first includes the groups of religious orientation, known to the media as the hard-liners, extremists, or terrorists. These groups adhere to a system of religious ideas and interpretations which allow the designation of individuals, societies and states as heretic and, consequently, legitimise the use of violence against them. The second type comprises the political and social groups which embrace a religious ideology, and are described as moderate, or groups following the orientation of political Islam.

In more concrete terms, the groups that took the initiative of banning violence, first among them Al-Gama'a Al-Islamiya and Al-Jihad, have been characterised since their emergence as Islamic religious groups. This was the case, at any rate, until 5 July. Their classification as "Islamic religious groups" was based on their reading of Islam, centred on a conceptual system, strategy and pattern of metaphysical belief manifested in three domains. The first tenet of this system is that monotheism is the basic premise of Islam, and that the essence of human existence is obedience in the worship of God. The literal application of God's ordinances and His Prophet's teachings represent the second tenet. The third tenet consists of unconditional obedience as the basis of faith, which dispenses the faithful from the need for rational analysis. Total adherence to these tenets, which constitute strict restraints on the practical and intellectual development of these groups, prevents them from seeking to formulate parallel rules based on *individual* interpretation and extrapolation. In this context, Qur'anic and prophetic texts, as well as some of the examples provided by revered members of the Islamic community, represent the only source capable of providing these groups with new concepts, organisational strategies and technical experience.

These groups identify completely with the early Islamic heritage. They read contemporary Arab reality through the prism of that era. They employ categories from the distant past. Political power and the state do not represent a pivotal axis in the thoughts and activities of those groups, except in terms of their religious perception of social existence, and their reading of the era of the Prophet and the four Rightly-Guided Caliphs. Therefore, although most of those groups perceive society as tainted by unbelief and ignorance of Islam, they consider that the path to salvation lies in preaching commitment to the tenets of Islam *within the framework* of a specific historical era: the time spent by the Prophet Mohamed preaching in Mecca, before the flight to Medina. Another faction refers to the era of the Prophet and the Caliphs in Medina, during which religion was integrated into the establishment of the state — i.e., politics.

The second main branch of Islamic groups, as mentioned above, is made up of the political and social groups which have adopted an Islamic ideology. Despite the outward similarity between the two types of groups, there is a great difference between them in substance. The political groups aim directly at attaining political power. Their goal is to implement their intellectual and political programme, which, they are convinced, will bring prosperity and progress. This pragmatic turn in thought and activity distinguishes them sharply from the strictly religious groups, which aim only at achieving an ideal state for the worship of God and obedience to His decrees, regardless of the wisdom or purpose of such decrees. For the political and social groups, on the other hand, the reading of social and political reality as it is lived is not limited to the experience of the Prophet and the Caliphs, nor is it exclusively derived from closed Qur'anic and Prophetic texts. This reading embraces 14 centuries of Islamic history and heritage. Hence, the political and social groups' frame of reference does not consist exclusively of analogies and projections based on that era, its terminology and categories: they draw upon more contemporary sources as well.

This distinction has governed the Egyptian Islamic movement since the early '70s. Consequently, the fact that the initiative to stop violence was taken by Al-Gama'a and Al-Jihad, as well as a number of smaller, similar groups, may indicate a qualitative change from a religious to a socio-political orientation. This suggestion is based on the nature of the initiative and its relation to the original conceptual and logical framework of the groups in question. By their very nature as Islamic religious groups, they have always perceived the Egyptian state as mired in ignorance and heresy, and sought to replace it by an Islamic state.

Clearly, the decision to stop violent operations in*side Egypt and abroad means that the groups adopting* this initiative have taken a new stand concerning the legitimacy of the Egyptian government. According to this new perspective, the government's status no longer warrants the perpetration of violence in a bid to overthrow it. Despite the fact that no statements were issued subsequently to explain the premises for the unexpected initiative, its scale and substance suggests that a qualitative leap has indeed occurred. Such a decision, indeed, implies a wholesale reconsideration of the legal basis of Al-Gama'a and Al-Jihad, and even of many of Sayed Qutb's precepts, such as the paganism of society, on which many radical groups were founded. The necessity of jihad as a prerequisite to the establishment of an Islamic state and a community capable of confronting external enemies, is therefore also subject to reconsideration. The declaration also implies that other pillars of radical Islam are being questioned.

The practical reasons for this decision must be understood if its implications are to be grasped fully. The most common explanation is that it results from the relentless siege imposed on group members and cadres, and the success of the security forces in striking decisive blows against the two groups both inside Egypt and abroad in the last two years. Important as this factor may be, it is not sufficient to explain an unprecedented initiative with such important intellectual and conceptual ramifications. It is more probable that the Arab-Israeli conflict, together with continued Israeli aggression in the occupied Palestinian lands and in south Lebanon, have affected the thought of these and other radical religious groups. Israeli hostilities have prompted Islamic leaders to review their priorities. Nor can the influence of other Islamic groups in south Lebanon and Palestine be excluded in establishing the struggle against Israel and the US as a priority, which must take precedence over the fight against the regimes in power throughout the Arab world. Consequently, it seems that the leaders and cadres of these groups, having witnessed the escalating resentment caused by Israeli attacks on the Palestinian and Lebanese peoples, and the violation of sacred Islamic sites in Jerusalem in particular and Palestine in general, have revised the principles on which their *strategy was based*.

At any rate, the trend that gives priority to the struggle against Israel and its main ally had already begun to emerge at the time of the attack on Greek tourists a year and a half ago. The statement issued later by Al-Gama'a Al-Islamiya revealed that the attack was directed against Israeli, not Greek, tourists.

A number of other statements issued recently by Al-Gama'a Al-Islamiya indicate a similar transformation. Most prominent among these is the message sent by Omar Abdel-Rahman from his prison in the US, in which he declared: "Since the greatest enemies [of Muslims] are known by all, let us join hands to destroy and eliminate them. 'May God grant victory to whom He chooses. God is the Most Powerful, the Almighty'." This statement clearly reveals the scope of the intellectual and political break implied by the initiative to halt violent operations.

It would seem that the radical Islamic groups in Egypt are on the verge of an important transformation into political groups upholding an Islamic religious ideology. The contradiction the initiative poses to the intellectual framework which these groups followed previously implies that they have been freed from the shackles of perceiving the present through the prism of the past.

The writer is a researcher at Al-Ahram Centre for Political and Strategic Studies.



"The desert... for me," says Walid Aouni of his latest production, *The Desert of Shadi Abdel-Salam*, "is something visual, something deep, something tranquil, something horizontal, of the horizon... like Shadi Abdel-Salam's film *The Night of Counting the Years.*" Performed last March and re-released this week, *The Desert* is the third part of a trilogy about Egyptian artists. The first, *Coma*, had as its immediate source of inspiration the attempt on novelist Naguib Mahfouz's life, while *The Last Interview* — the second part of the trilogy — took painter Tahia Halim's life and work as its subject. In this, the third part of the trilogy, it is to an art form combining image and text that Aouni turns, thus giving full scope to his many-faceted, versatile choreographic imagination.





Clockwise from top: the March performance of Aouni's *The Desert of Shadi Abdel-Salam*; Nadia Lutfi in Abdel-Salam's *The Night of Counting the Years*; Abdel-Salam photographed by Van Leo

Music

Cutting the festival cake

David Blake samples six slices

Highlights from the Ismailia International Folkloric Festival: Open Air Theatre, Cairo Opera House: 25 and 27 August

Summer means festivals; they even proliferate in Egypt. The Ismailia International Folkloric Festival is really one of the most interesting. Groups come from all over the world, from China to the Mediterranean, to North Africa, through Middle Europa to the Northern Norse lands. Ismailia hosts the lot. And then many of them performed again in Cairo.

Folkloric is not regular theatre. Nothing is spoken. Some of it is sung, but most events are danced. They have some fantasy and hardly any narrative. What is delivered is danced mostly in the homelands, in 1997 versions of once legendary movements which have evolved over the centuries. They have very ancient roots, and their historic impact is strongly felt. From the north to the south of Europe, these tunes and performances have been the basis of Europe's ballet and opera. Seen from hindsight they are very important and, now as Europe faces economic and spiritual changes, they have grown to be, these folkloric spectacles, valuable displays of the cultural links of the nations which perform them.

Far away in the Pacific Ocean arc of countries, the folkloric also flourishes and it was China which offered the opening display of dances given in the Cairo Open Air Theatre. China has a positively bewildering arc of years over which tunes and dances have evolved. Its folkloric show sent the historic years packing. It settled for its 20th century history. No names are suggested, no political aspects directly mentioned, no Mao Tse Tung Leninist dogma was even hinted at; a sort of veil was drawn over China's recent history. Viewing it, the show was merely a young thing. Ancient China is alive and moving, very much moving and on the go somewhere — everywhere.

There were plenty of costume changes, mainly dark, leaning to black for the men, and bright slashing spears of yellow and red for the girls. No doubt about keeping it primary and action filled. There were hints of war somewhere over the borders of limelight. The dance routines suggested European dance theatre very much muscled up — stupendous jumps and flying airborne bodies. Then a line of yellow dazzle girls doing a mast belly dance, presumably a gift to the hosting nation. Finally the entire group rushed down stage to face the audience in a dramatic frenzy of dancers in feats of balance worthy of the Peking Opera. The dance groups of the West, either dance theatre or classic, had better look out; they're really dancing out East.

If this performance were not sufficient, next came Turkey — halfway Far East. This was the finest offering of the show. They were a large group. The men throughout wore mostly black, always with caps on the head and splendidly shod in elegant boots. The women, tall, were striking — beauties with fine features clothed in hand embroidered traditional dresses, of the utmost refinement of colour. With the men as background, they danced to the strange silvery cacophony that must have dazzled 18th century Europe and which Mozart loved and used. It even sounds 19th century in 1997.

The company moved with authority and complete professionalism through dance routines that would have taxed a classical company. The men's elevation and strength made it almost impossible to remember that all these dancers are university students and this travelling show is a sort of gift they make to show what Turkey can do with the dance. Empires come and go and Turkey, like some other survivors with a colourful past, wishes to show the audience that the dance goes on forever in spite of one's family ties.

Rumania was the last of the first night's offering of the Ismailia Festival highlights. It was a long event, singers and dancers excellent and a tireless musical band to accompany them. The clothes, like the Turkish, were of simple design, made to display very refined colours. The *couture* of stylish refinement was a feature of all of the Ismailia folk dancers.

The girls of the three shows looked fresh, radiant and caring. These Rumanian ones added wit and the singers, in traditional tunes, sang without flaw. But too long. Roundel melodies can be repeated only so often. The chief lady singer and her band played on and on, but the girls, in stately Queen Marie of Rumania outfits, saved the night.

The second evening's Ismailia Festival highlights began with Bulgaria — a large group with music sounding like the overture to the *Battaglia di Legnano* of Verdi, hushed to start with, then developing into sounds of war and mayhem from far across the desert. The dancers sprang to action. It looked like a fight, but was not one at all. They squeezed themselves into a tight circle, facing inwards like a football scrum, shoulder to shoulder — and so the spectacle began. The music was rhythmic, the dancers taking tiny minute steps, or rather hops than steps, and the circle slowly revolved. Round and round they hopped without the slightest variation. It grew mesmeric, hypnotic. Round and round like wood insects or white ants. But they were in red, fine flowing red costumes, and they opened outwards from a gap they had let form in the tight circle and slowly swayed out into a straight line, slowly going back and forth across the stage. The tempo increased, their steps grew faster, and the hops even smaller, until they were waving and swaying about like a sea anemone in a rock pool. Strange and quite beautifully inhuman and perfectly executed.

There was loud singing and dancing for the red insects. It suddenly came to an end with the troupe growing human, acknowledging applause and moving quickly into the dark.

After this there was more martial music, but of an Arabic type, and we were definitely in the Orient. Tunis had come. A trio of dancers appeared: two women and a very large, opulently fleshed man. The clothes again stole the show — or almost, because Tunis had much to set before the audience. There was no tale telling narrative, just dance, pure dance, or whatever it is that the belly or near-belly dance represents.

Everything moved quickly, and the music was clear, loud and tuneful. Men came with threshing equipment to strain grain. They tossed the grain high in the air, jumped around to ballet-like tunes, and were joined by the women. Simple activities were given absolutely mystical importance by the execution of the dancers. It all looked too beautiful for words. The dancers moved around freely during the performance, relaxed and adding their own variations as they went along. The colours of the whole scene shone delicately. It looked fresh and clean. The women's clothes were beginning of century, ornate and flowing. And everything danced, even the veils they wore joined the swaying movement of the entire company.

There was a climax. Two women, especially tall and wearing these flowing garments, were caught by the strong wind and they and their garments appeared like living sculptures. They were joined by the huge man, newly changed into a white uniform with magnificent black belt around his copious middle. He and the women were the success of the evening. They began a dance, tempo *prestissimo*, and it was, well, belly extremis. They whirled and swayed, filling the big space with pleasure and a sort of electric brightness. The huge man then took off on his own and gave a version of a complicated belly dance routine. Do men belly as well as women? Is it done? It was done by this dancer. He swooped and rolled. His technique of rolling was like sea waves in motion. There was something illustrious about his bulk. He became a Ganesh, the elephant god of the Hindus. Elephants are large, humorous and unafraid, and so was he. It was a joy to watch him and his two friends bring such pace and colour to the Cairo Open Air Theatre.

After Tunis, everything sounded flat. Albania came on to show that their own folklore had something special. It had swinging music of a kind uniquely vivid like Hungarian tunes. They all danced in white and gold, girls and boys, turning the night into grand operetta.

The Ismailia International Folkloric Festival

Listings

EXHIBITIONS

Shawqi Rizq (Paintings)
El-Hanager, Opera House grounds Gezira. Tel 340 6861. Daily until 9 Sept.

Gamal Gad Mleika
Exhibition Hall, Al-Ahram Building, El-Galaa St, Boulaq. Tel 5786100. Daily 9am-10pm.
Recent paintings and sculpture by an Egyptian artist now resident in Italy.

Milton Glaser
Sony Gallery, Main Campus, American University in Cairo, Mohamed Mahmoud St. Tel 357 5424. Daily exc Fri & Sat, 9am-12pm & 6pm-9pm. Until 15 Sept.
Posters and book covers, store designs and toy creations, magazine formats and logotypes are on display at the artist's first exhibition in the Middle East.

Valparaiso
Cervantes Institute for Spanish Culture, Alexandria annex, 101 El-Horreya Avenue, Alexandria.
An exhibit of lithographs, postcards and photographs.

Collective Exhibition
Espace Gallery, 1 El-Sherifein St, Downtown. Tel 393 1699. Daily 10am-2pm & 6pm-9pm; Fri 6pm-9pm. Until 20 Sept
A retrospective display of works by Assem Sharaf, Dina El-Gharib, Hassaan Ali Ahmed, Hazem El-Mestekawy, Hisham El-Zeiny, Hussein Sharif, Mohamed Abdel-Moneim, Omar El-Fayoumi and Sherif Abdel-Badie, all of whom held exhibitions at the gallery during the last season.

Group Show
Donia Gallery, 20 Abdel-Aziz Gawish St, Doctors' Tower, 4th floor, Bab El-Louq. Tel 355 8367. Daily 12pm-10pm. Until 30 Sept.
Works by Hamed Nada, Adham Wanli, Hosny El-Banani, Seif Wanli, Fatma Rifaat, Mohamed Nagui and Zakaria El-Zeini among others.

Summer Collection
Khan El-Maghraby Gallery, 18 El-Mansour Mohamed St, Zamalek. Tel 340 3349. Daily exc Fri, 10.30am-2pm & 5pm-10pm. Until the end of Sept.
Works by Tahiya Halim, Abdel-Wahab Mursi, Salem Salah, George Bahgory, Hassan Abdel-Fattah, among others.

Group Exhibition
Mashrabiya Gallery, 8 Champollion St, Downtown. Tel 578 4494. Daily 5pm-10pm. Until the end of Sept.
Works by over 20 artists, including George Bahgory, Mohamed Abla, Salah Hassouna, Xavier Puigmarti, Esmat Dawistashi and Aziz El-Hihi.

Suzanne Mubarak Children's Museum
34 Abu Bakr El-Seddiq St, Heliopolis. Tel 249 9915. Daily exc Mon, 9am-2pm.

The Museum of Mr and Mrs Mohamed Mahmoud Khalil
1 Kafour El-Akhshid St, Dokki. Tel 336 2376. Daily exc Mon, 10am-6pm.
Egypt's largest collection of nineteenth century European art, amassed by the late Mahmoud Khalil and his wife, includes works by Courbet, Van Gogh, Gauguin, and Rodin and a host of impressionist works, housed in the villa once belonging to the Khalils and converted into a museum with little, if any, expense spared. There are also a number of excellent orientalist works.

Egyptian Museum
Tahrir Sq, Downtown. Tel 575 4319. Daily exc Fri, 8am-5pm; Fri 9am-11.15am & 1pm-3pm.
The world's largest collection of Pharaonic and Ptolemaic treasures, including massive granite statues and the smallest household objects used by the Ancient Egyptians, along with, of course, the controversial mummies room. A perennial must.

Coptic Museum
Mar Girgis, Old Cairo. Tel 362 8766. Daily exc Fri, 9am-4pm; Fri 9am-11am & 1pm-3pm.
Founded in 1910, the museum houses a distinguished collection of Coptic art and artefacts, including textiles, manuscripts, icons and architectural features in a purpose built structure in the heart of the Coptic city. Elegant, airy, and with pleasant garden cafe.

Islamic Museum
Port Said St, Ahmed Maher St, Bab El-Khalq. Tel 390 9930/390 1520. Daily exc Fri, 9am-4pm; Fri 9am-11.30am & 2pm-4pm.
A vast collection of Islamic arts and crafts including *mashrabiya*, lustreware ceramics, textiles, woodwork, coins and manuscripts drawn from Egypt's Fatimid, Ayyubid and Mameluke periods and from other countries in the Islamic world.

Museum of Modern Egyptian Art
Opera House Grounds, Gezira. Tel 340 6861. Daily exc Mon, 10am-1pm & 5pm-9pm.
A permanent display of paintings and sculpture charting the modern art movement in Egypt from its earliest pioneers to latest practitioners. A state of the art museum housing the contemporary art of the state.

Mohamed Nagui Museum
Château Pyramids, 9 Mahmoud Al-Guindi St, Giza.
A museum devoted to the paintings of Mohamed Nagui (1888-1956), the Alexandrian aristocrat who is considered one of the pioneers of the modern Egyptian art movement.

Mahmoud Mukhtar Museum
Tahrir St, Gezira. Daily exc Sun and Mon, 9am-1.30pm.
A permanent collection of works by the sculptor Mahmoud Mukhtar (d. 1934), whose granite monument to Saad Zaghloul stands near Qasr El-Nil Bridge, and whose Egypt Awakening became, somewhat belatedly, an icon of post revolutionary Egypt.

FILMS

A Little Duck Tale
Japanese Information and Culture Centre, 106 Qasr El-Aini St, Garden City. 4 Sept, 6pm.

Russian Films
Pushkin Centre for Russian Culture, 127 El-Tahrir St, Dokki. Tel 360 6371.
Russian and Egyptian film screenings every Monday at 7pm.

Commercial cinemas change their programmes every Monday. The information provided is valid through to Sunday after which it is wise to check with the cinemas. Arabic films are seldom subtitled. For information, contact the venue.

El-Masir (Le Destin)
Odeon I, Abdel Hamid Said St, Downtown. Tel 575 8797. MGM, Kollevat El-Nasr Sq, Maadi. Tel 352 3066. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. El-Salam, 65 Abdel-Hamid Badawi St, Heliopolis. Tel 293 1072. Daily 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm. El-Haram, El-Haram St, Giza. Tel 385 8358. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Karim I, 15 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 591 6095. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Normandy, 31 El-Ahram St, Heliopolis. Tel 258 0254. Daily 12.30pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm. Radio, 24 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Tel 575 6562. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Tahrir, 112 Tahrir St, Dokki. Tel 335 4726. Daily 1pm, 3pm, 6pm, 9pm.
Youssef Chahine's latest mega-production, starring Nour El-Sherif, Leila Elwi, Mahmoud Hemeida, Safeiya El-Emari and a large, young, esthetically pleasing cast.

Ismailia Rayeh Gaey (Ismailia Back and Forth)
Rivoli I, 26 July St, Downtown. Tel 575 5053. Daily 1pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm 8pm & 10pm. Cairo Sheraton, El-Galaa St, Giza. Tel 360 6081. Daily 10.30am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm, 9pm & midnight. Lido, 23 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 934 284. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Tiba II, Nasr City. Tel 262 9407. Daily 10.30am, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm. Odeon III, Abdel Hamid Said St, Downtown. Tel 575 8797. Daily 10.30am, 1.30pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm. Diana Palace, 17 El-Alfi St, Emadeddin, Downtown. Tel 924 727. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.
With Hanan Tork, Khaled El-Nabawi, Mohamed Heneidi and singer Mohamed Fouad.

El-Mar'a Wel-Satour (The Woman and the Cleaver)
Tiba I, Nasr City. Tel 262 9407. Daily 10.30am, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm. Sphinx, Sphinx Sq, Mohandessin. Tel 346 4017. Daily 8pm. Miami, 38 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Tel 574 5656. Daily noon, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Roxy, Roxy Sq, Heliopolis. Tel 258 0344. Daily 10am, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Cosmos I, 12 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 779 537. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Rivoli II, 26 July St, Downtown. Tel 575 5053. Daily 1pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm 8pm & 10pm.
Nabila Ebeid's latest venture involves the hacking to pieces of men.

El-Masir (Le Destin)

'Awdat El-Ebn El-Dall (Return of the Prodigal Son)
Odeon II, Abdel Hamid Said St, Downtown, Tel 575 8797 Daily 10.30am, 1.30pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm.
Directed by Youssef Chahine, the film stars Hesham Selim, Mahmoud El-Meligui and Magda El-Roumi.

The Saint
Metro, 35 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Tel 393 3897. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Ramsis Hilton II, Corniche El-Nil St. Tel 574 7435. Daily 1.30pm, 330pm, 6.30pm, 9.30pm & midnight.
With Val Kilmer and Elisabeth Shue.

Anaconda
Tahrir, 112 Tahrir St, Dokki. Tel 335 4726. Thur-Sat, midnight show.

The Arrival
Cosmos II, 12 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 779 537. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.
A new sci-fi with Charlie Sheen.

Double Team
Karim II, 15 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 592 4830. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.
With Jean-Claude Van Damme, Dennis Rodman and Mickey Rourke.

Liar Liar
Ramsis Hilton I, Corniche El-Nil St. Tel 574 7435. Daily 1.30pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm, 9.30pm & midnight.
For one day attorney Jim Carrey can only tell the truth.

Hazzemni Ya...
Cinema Cairo, Sarwat St, Abdeen, Downtown. Tel 574 5350. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.
Fifi Abdou's belly-dancing stage hit transferred to the screen.

DANCE

The Desert of Shady Abdel-Salam
Main Hall, Opera House, Gezira. Tel 341 2926. 2-5 & 7-9 Sept, 9pm.
The Opera Dance Theatre Company perform under Walid Aouni's direction.

MUSIC

Master Symphony I
Main Hall, Opera House, as above. 6 Sept, 9pm.
Performing Debussy's Prelude a l'apres-midi d'un faune, Mozart's Symphony no 41 in C-major K 551, Beethoven's Symphony No 5 op 67 in C-minor, conducted by Ahmed El-Saedi.

El-Tannoura Troupe
El-Hanager, Opera House grounds, Gezira. Tel 340 5861. 6 Sept, 10pm.
A folkloric dance performance from Port Said.

Nubian Folklore
El-Hanager, Opera House grounds, as above. 7 Sept, 10pm.
With singer Ahmed Sallam.

Popular Folklore
El-Hanager, as above. 8 Sept, 10pm.
With Gamalat Shiha.

THEATRE

70 Hill Lane
National Theatre, Ataba Sq. Tel 591 1267. 6 & 7 Sept, 8pm.
The Improbable Theatre Company, perform, to live music by Ben Park, a humorous show by Phelim McDermott, based on a true and haunting childhood experience.

Mama America
Qasr El-Nil Theatre, Qasr El-Nil St. Tel 575 0761. Sat & Sun 10pm, Mon 8pm.
Starring and directed by Mohamed Sobhi.

'A'elat Wanis (Wanis' Family)
Qasr El-Nil Theatre, as above. Weds & Thurs, 10pm, Fri 8pm.
Directed by Mohamed Sobhi and starring all the family members of the televised series.

Bahlool Fi Istambul
Hilton Ramsis Theatre, Hilton Ramsis annex, El-Galaa St. Tel 574 7435. Daily 10pm exc Fri, 5.30pm
With Samir Ghanem, Elham Shahin and Bothayna Rashwan.

Wada'an Ya Bakawat (Farewell Sirs)
George Abiad Hall, National Theatre, Ataba Sq. Tel 591 7783. Daily 10 pm.
With Hala Sedqi, Farouq El-Fishawi and Ezzat El-Alayli, directed by Essam El-Sayed.

'Alam Guinenah (The World of Guinenah)
Small Hall, National Theatre, Ataba Sq. Tel 591 7783. Daily 9pm.
Musical directed Fawzi El-Melighi, score by Tarek Abbas.

El-Zaim (The Leader)
El-Haram Theatre, Pyramids Road, Giza. Tel 386 3952. Daily 10pm, Fri & Mon 8.30pm.
With Adel Imam; directed by Sherif Arafa.

El-Mahzala (The Farce)
El-Salam Theatre, Qasr El-Aini St. Tel 355 2484. Daily 9pm.
Youssef Idris play revived with Sherine, Omar El-Hariri and Tarek El-Dessouqi, directed by Shaker Abdel-Latif.

Ballo (Fanfare)
Madinat Nasr Theatre, Youssef Abbas St, Nasr City. Tel 402 0804. Daily 10pm; Fri & Mon 8.30pm.
A large crowd including Mahmoud El-Guindi, Salah El-Saadani, Samah Anwar and Ashraf Abdel-Baqi and a contingent of Russian ballet dancers; directed by Samir El-Asfouri.

Cromb, Zabadi (Cabbage, Yoghurt)
Radio, 24 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Tel 575 6562. Daily 10pm, exc Mon & Fri, 8pm
Sayed Saleh, Ahmed Bedeir and legendary dancer Nagwa Fouad, directed by Essam El-Sayed.

Ta'm El-Kalam (The Taste of Words)
El-Talia, Ataba Square, Downtown. Tel 937 948. Daily 10 pm
Abdullah Mahmoud, Farouk Naguib and Manal Salama, directed by Hossam El-Din Saleh.

Malek Walla Kitabah (Heads or Tails)
Small Hall, El-Talia, Ataba Square, Downtown. Tel 937 948. Daily 8pm
Mustafa Saad directs Medhat Morsi and Salwa Osman in his own play

Leila Foll (Jasmine Night)
Floating Theatre, Adjacent University Bridge, Manial. Tel 364 9516. For times check with venue.
Mahmoud El-Alfi directs Ola Ramī, Emad Rashad, Mohamed Farid and singer Ahmed Ibrahim in a light musical.

All information correct at time of going to press. However, it remains wise to check with venues first, since programmes, dates and times are subject to change at very short notice.
Please send information to Listings, *Al-Ahram Weekly*, Galaa St, Cairo. Tel 5786064. Fax 5786089/833.

Compiled by Injy El-Kashef

Around the galleries

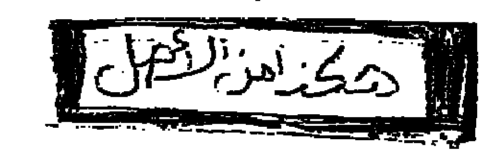


Mahmoud Abul-Azzam Diab

INTIMACY with the Egyptian countryside and a fondness for its traditions and rituals are writ large across the paintings of **Mahmoud Abul-Azzam Diab**, currently on show in the **Centre for Arts, Zamalek**. Even when, in terms of subject matter, the paintings venture forth to more distant lands, the mood remains rural and homely.

The gallery attached to the **Higher Council for Youth and Sports** hosts over 50 works in a variety of media — paintings, watercolours, ceramics and photographs — by young Kuwaiti artists. The still life by **Ali Al-Baloushi**, the romantic dreamscape by **Maasouma Hadad** and the seascapes by **Khaloud Al-Qahtany** are among the more noteworthy works on exhibit.

Reviewed by Nagwa El-Ashri



Take one, take two

Khairiya El-Beshlawi raises the curtain of this year's Alexandria Film Festival for Mediterranean Countries







Clockwise from top: *To Die Four* (US); *The Essence* (Poland); *Three Lives and Only One Death* (French-Portuguese co-production)

The 13th Alexandria Film Festival for Mediterranean Countries is to open next Monday. That the title of a film festival should combine Alexandria's name with Mediterranean countries raises expectations for a cultural event with a specificity. Alexandria has always been a cultural and ethnic crucible. It was the second city in the world to witness the art of cinema after the Lumière brothers invented cinematography in France and among the pioneers of cinema were Alexandrians, be they foreign residents or Egyptians like Mohamed Bayoumi.

When in 1979 the Alexandria Film Festival was launched by the late Kamal El-Mallakh, journalist and founder of the Egyptian Association for Film Writers and Critics, we thought it would be a cinematic beacon, as it were, spot-lighting the film-industries of countries around the Mediterranean. But the history of the festival has not been altogether smooth sailing, and the festival itself has become the subject of much criticism in the media.

One of the main charges brought against the festival in recent years has to do with the mismanagement and general anarchy of the event. Another bone of contention is the festival's bias for certain stars at the expense of others and the favoritism towards this or that film producer. Another irony of the festival is that the Egyptian films, which are premiered at the festival and which are hardly the most significant item on the agenda as far as Egyptian critics are concerned, grab a lion's share of publicity. While foreign critics — a minority at the festival — may take an interest in Egyptian films, to local critics these entries are hardly anything to write home about. Instead, the main attraction of this and other festivals for Egyptian critics is the fact that they screen foreign films to which the Egyptian viewer would not normally have access since local commercial cinemas are monopolised by American films.

The Alexandria Film Festival will be giving a fair sample of these national film industries that do not enjoy commercial screenings in Egypt. Festival-goers will see *The Area Was Covered in Snow* (1995), directed by Kamara Kamalov from Uzbekistan, Polish director Teresa Kutlaritzec's 1996 production *Visit Me In My Dreams*, and *The Prostitutes* (1995) by Hungarian director Idelco Sabo. The Czech *Trains Under Strict Security*, directed by Gerry Menzel, a classic of world cinema previously screened at the Ciné Club in Cairo, will be shown at the festival in commemoration of the centenary of cinema. Closer to home, the audience will watch the Syrian film *Nigum Al-Nahar* (Stars of the Day, 1988), *The Journey of the Hands of the Clock* (1997), by famous Turkish director Omar Kafour, and *Before the End of the World* (1996), by Greek director Panayotis Marolis.

Over 30 films, from the Mediterranean and elsewhere, will be screened at the festival this year. Film entries in the main competition include *The Forbidden Woman* (France), the Italian-French-Spanish co-production *The Flat*, the Spanish film *A Look of Love*, the Greek *Before the End of the World*, the Turkish *Please Don't Go*, in addition to several Arab films. This apart from the competition of Directorial Debut, and a "panorama section" for recent Mediterranean films.

The opening film is to be the French-Portuguese co-production *Three Lives and Only One Death*, directed by Raoul Ruizz and starring Marcello Mastroianni in the last lead role he played before his death; his co-actors in this film include his daughter Chiara as well as Anna Galiena. The film charts the psyche of a schizophrenic middle-aged man. We see him first in the guise of a sailor who returns home after a 20-year absence to discover that his wife who had assumed he was dead, has remarried. He then lures the second husband to his old flat and kills him. Next we see Mastroianni as a professor of anthropology who forsakes his rich mother's flat to lead the life of a vagabond. In his third guise he appears as a servant in a mansion who silently watches the two young lovers who employ him. The fourth character played by Mastroianni is that of a capitalist who awaits with apprehension the return of his wife and daughter, a return which somehow constitutes a threat to his life. It is only towards the end of the film that the viewer discovers that all these different characters are facets of one and the same complex man imprisoned within the multiple-personalities.

The US is participating in this year's festival with seven films. Perhaps the most significant of the American entries is Neil Jordan's 1996 production *Michael Collins*, which has already been screened commercially in Cairo. The film is based on a true story, that of the Irish revolutionary Michael Collins who fought in the 1920s for his country's independence from Britain.

One of the virtues of the festival is that it sheds light on the current condition of Egyptian cinema. If the number of Egyptian films participating in the festival is as great as the organisers claim, then there is reason to be optimistic. As we go to print, however, the only Egyptian films one can say with any certainty will be screened are *Afreet Al-Nahar* (Demon of the Day), directed by Adel El-A'sar and starring Nur El-Sherif and Ilham Shahine, Inas El-Degheidi's *Dentilla* (Lace), with Youssra and Ilham Shahine in the lead roles, and *Pizza... Pizza*, the directorial debut of Mazen El-Gabali, starring Jala Fahmi and Ashraf Abdel-Baqi. As in previous years, seminars open to the public accompany the screenings.

A number of prominent figures in the Egyptian film industry will be honoured by the festival this year. The honorees include comedian Fouad El-Mohandes, director Kamal Attiya, and film author and playwright Saadeddin Wahba.

The value of film festivals is not in the number of films screened or stars present but in their capacity as forums for cultural encounters. In this respect, the Alexandria Film Festival, with its focus on the cultures bordering the Mediterranean Sea, has great potential. And there is reason for optimism this year: this, the 13th round, has a new man at the helm, Raouf Tewfik, film critic and editor-in-chief of *Sabah El-Kheir* magazine. May he draw lessons from the twelve previous rounds.

Ninth International Festival for Experimental Theatre Programme

Thursday, 4 Sept

El-Tali'a Theatre, Salah Abdel-Sabour Hall, 6pm:
Dangerous Liaisons (Moldova)
National Theatre, George Abiad Hall, 7pm:
Say A Hymn To Wake Up The Giant (Kuwait)
El-Ghadd Experimental Hall, 7pm:
Bahiya The Mute (Egypt)
El-Hanager, 8pm:
The Other Side Of Silence (Egypt)
Puppet Theatre, 8.30pm:
Toujours L'Amour (Romania)
El-Tali'a Theatre, Zaki Tolaimat Hall, 9pm:
Happy Days (Argentina)
Opera House, Main Hall, 9pm:
The Desert of Shadi Abdel-Salam (Egypt)
Gomhouriya Theatre, 9pm:
The Descent (Australia)
Opera House, Small Hall, 9pm:
Love Affair (Lebanon)
El-Ghouri Palace, 9pm:
Waiting for Godot (Venezuela)
El-Hawari House, 9pm:
An Egyptian Girl's Story (Egypt)
Academy of Arts, Sayed Darwish Hall, 9pm:
Matruska (Turkey)
Opera House, Open Air Theatre, 10pm:
Lysistrata (Cyprus)
El-Salam Theatre, 10pm:
Without Nothing (Tunis)
Floating Theatre, Main Hall, 10pm:
The Taste of Vanity (Egypt)
Sound and Light Hall, 11pm:
Atrides (Greece)
Floating Theatre, Small Hall, midnight.
Ferdinands un Sibilla (Latvia)

Friday, 5 Sept

El-Tali'a Theatre, Salah Abdel-Sabour Hall, 6pm:
Dangerous Liaisons (Maldova)
El-Ghadd Experimental Hall, 7pm:
Bahiya the Mute (Egypt)
Opera House, Main Hall, 7pm:
The Desert of Shadi Abdel-Salam (Egypt)
Puppet Theatre, 8pm:
Toujours L'Amour (Romania)
National Theatre, George Abiad Hall, 8pm:
Say A Hymn To Wake Up The Giant (Kuwait)
Floating Theatre, Small Hall, 8pm:
Ferdinands un Sibilla (Latvia)
El-Hanager, 8pm:
The Orchestra (The Netherlands)
Opera House, Small Hall, 8.30pm:
Love Affair (Lebanon)
Gomhouriya Theatre, 9pm:
The Descent (Australia)
El-Salam Theatre, 9pm:
Without Nothing (Tunis)
El-Tali'a Theatre, Zaki Tolaimat Hall, 9pm:
The Story of Happiness and Grief and Love in the Garden (Ukraine)
Academy of Arts, Sayed Darwish Hall, 9pm:
Matruska (Turkey)
Floating Theatre, Main Hall, 10pm:
The Taste of Vanity (Egypt)
Opera House, Open Air Theatre, 10pm:
Hips With A Brain (Belgium)
El-Ghouri Palace, 10.30pm:
The Egg or Experimental Passing By Experiment (Bulgaria)
Sound and Light Hall, 11pm:
Isadora Duncan (Ukraine)

Saturday, 6 Sept

El-Ghadd Experimental Hall, 7pm:
Lover (Russia)
National Theatre, George Abiad Hall, 8pm:
70 Hill Lane (UK)
El-Hanager, 8pm:
The Orchestra (The Netherlands)
Opera House, Small Hall, 9pm:
Titania (Austria)
El-Salam Theatre, 9pm:
The Love Journey (Algeria)
El-Tali'a Theatre, Zaki Tolaimat Hall, 9pm:
The Story of Happiness and Grief and Love in the Garden (Ukraine)
El-Ghouri Palace, 9pm:
The Egg or Experimental Passing By Experiment (Bulgaria)
Zeinab Khatoun House, 9pm:
Journey (Egypt)
Academy of Arts, Sayed Durwish Hall, 9pm:
Murderer (Ukraine)
Puppet Theatre, 10pm:
On the Marionette Theatre (Austria)
Floating Theatre, Main Hall, 10pm:
Chimildique (Uzbekistan)
Opera House, Open Air Theatre, 10pm:
Hips With A Brain (Belgium)
Forte Grand Hotel Pool, 10pm:
Tavut (Kazakhstan)
Sound and Light Hall, 11pm:
Isadora Duncan (Ukraine)
Gomhouriya Theatre, 11.30pm:
Dissimulators (Hungary)



70 Hill Lane (UK)

Sunday, 7 Sept

Opera House, Small Hall, noon:
Titania (Austria)
El-Tali'a Theatre, Zaki Tolaimat Hall, 6pm:
Official Documents (Qatar)
El-Ghadd Experimental Hall, 7pm:
Lover (Russia)
El-Salam Theatre, 7.30pm:
The Love Journey (Algeria)
National Theatre, George Abiad Hall, 8pm:
70 Hill Lane (UK)
Puppet Theatre, 8pm:
On the Marionette Theatre (Austria)
Gomhouriya Theatre, 9pm:
Dissimulators (Hungary)
Zeinab Khatoun House, 9pm:
A Journey (Egypt)
Academy of Arts, Sayed Durwish Hall, 9pm:
Murderer (Ukraine)
Floating Theatre, Small Hall, 9.30pm:
Medea (Spain/Venezuela)
Forte Grand Hotel Pool, 10pm:
Tavut (Kazakhstan)
Floating Theatre, Main Hall, 11pm:
Chimildique (Uzbekistan)
El-Hanager, 11.30pm:
Jenghis Khan (Syria)

Monday, 8 Sept

Abdel-Rehim El-Zorqani Hall, 6pm:
Egg or Experimental Passing By Experiment (Bulgaria)
Puppet Theatre, 6pm:
Forgive Me, God (Russia)
El-Ghadd Experimental Hall, 7pm:
Theatrum Anatomicum (The Netherlands)
El-Salam Theatre, 7.30pm:
For You, the Way (Poland)
El-Hanager, 8pm:
Jenghis Khan (Syria)
Floating Theatre, Small Hall, 8pm:
Medea (Spain/Venezuela)
National Theatre, 8pm:
Guevara's Night (Egypt)
El-Tali'a Theatre, Zaki Tolaimat Hall, 9pm:
Official Documents (Qatar)
Academy of Arts, Sayed Darwish Hall, 9pm:
Dreams of 1001 Nights (The Netherlands)
El-Gomhouriya Theatre, 9pm:
A Midsummer Night's Dream (Egypt)
Floating Theatre, Main Hall, 9.30pm:
Socrates' True Apology (Albania)
Sound and Light Hall, 11pm:
Holocaust 20th C: A Hundred Years of Pleasure and Destruction (Japan)
Opera House, Small Hall, 11.30pm:
Aquarium (Italy)

Tuesday, 9 Sept

Abdel-Rehim El-Zorqani Hall, 6pm
Egg or Experimental Passing By Experiment (Bulgaria)
El-Ghadd Experimental Hall, 7pm:
Theatrum Anatomicum (The Netherlands)
El-Tali'a Theatre, Zaki Tolaimat Hall, 7pm:
Secrets of An Ancient Well (Ghana)
Floating Theatre, Small Hall, 8pm:
A Flower, the Life (Tunisia)
Puppet Theatre, 8pm:
Forgive Me, God (Russia)
Opera House, Small Hall, 9pm:
Aquarium (Italy)
El-Hanager, 8pm:
The Other Side of Silence (Egypt)
National Theatre, 8pm:
Rituals of Signs and Transformations (Egypt)
El-Ghouri Palace, 9pm:
Seven Days of Man (Egypt)
Academy of Arts, Sayed Darwish Hall, 9pm:
Dreams of 1001 Nights (The Netherlands)
El-Gomhouriya Theatre, 9pm:
A Midsummer Night's Dream (Egypt)
El-Salam Theatre, 9pm:
For You, the Way (Poland)
El-Tali'a Theatre, Salah Abdel-Sabour Hall, 9pm:
Heroes Party (Zambia)
Floating Theatre, Main Hall, 10pm:
Socrates' True Apology (Albania)
Sound and Light Hall, 11.30pm:
Holocaust 20th C: A Hundred Years of Pleasure and Destruction (Japan)

Wednesday, 10 Sept

El-Salam Theatre, noon:
... And Three Virgins to the Moon (Singapore)
Puppet Theatre, 7pm:
Emptiness of My Love (Venezuela)
Floating Theatre, Small Hall, 8pm:
A Flower, the Life (Tunisia)
El-Hanager, 8pm:
Woyzeck (Egypt)
El-Tali'a Theatre, Salah Abdel-Sabour Hall, 8pm:
Heroes Party (Zambia)
National Theatre, 8pm:
Senouhie (Egypt)
El-Gomhouriya Theatre, 8.30pm:
Secrets of Shaherasada (Belarus)
El-Ghouri Palace, 9pm:
Seven Days of Man (Egypt)
El-Tali'a Theatre, Zaki Tolaimat Hall, 9pm:
Secrets of an Ancient Well (Ghana)
Floating Theatre, Main Hall, 10pm:
The Dream (Egypt)
Opera House, Small Hall:
The Pit (Jordan)
Academy of Arts, Sayed Darwish Hall, 11pm:
Crime and Punishment (Yemen)

Thursday 11, Sept

El-Gomhouriya Theatre, 11am:
Secrets of Shaherasada (Belarus)
Academy of Arts, Sayed Darwish Hall, 11am:
Crime and Punishment (Yemen)
Puppet Theatre, noon:
Emptiness of My Love (Venezuela)
El-Salam Theatre, noon:
... And Three Virgins to the Moon (Singapore)
National Theatre, 8pm:
Senouhie (Egypt)
El-Tali'a Theatre, Zaki Tolaimat Hall, 9pm:
Hymn (Egypt)
Floating Theatre, Main Hall, 10pm:
The Dream (Egypt)
Opera House, Small Hall, 11pm:
The Pit (Jordan)

Puppet Theatre: Ataba Sq. Tel 591 0954.
El-Hanager: Opera House grounds, Gezira. Tel 340 6861.
National Theatre: Ataba Sq. Tel 591 1267.
El-Salam Theatre: Qasr El-Aini St. Tel 355 2484.
El-Tali'a Theatre: Ataba Sq. Tel 937 948.
Floating Theatre: Bahr El-Azam St, Giza.
Academy of Arts, Sayed Darwish Hall: Pyramids Road, Giza. Tel 561 3985.
Opera House: Gezira. Tel 341 2926.
Gomhouriya Theatre: El-Gomhouriya St. Tel 391 9956.
El-Ghouri Palace: 3 El-Sheikh Mohamed Abdu St, El-Azhar. Tel 511 0472.
Zeinab Khatoun House: Darrassa, behind El-Azhar Mosque. Tel 340 7001.
El-Hawari House: Darrassa, behind El-Azhar Mosque. Tel 340 4234.

All information correct at time of going to press.

Plain Talk

It seems that there will be no end of discussions about the English language. What makes the debates about English important is the general acceptance that it is the global language adopted by almost all international organisations. It is a regular subject for discussion in the European Union where there is consensus that it should be the official language, rather than French or German. It is rumoured that the European Union Commissioners are supporters of this. However there is a general feeling that some changes should be introduced and that some of the idiosyncrasies should be removed.

At the same time the battle is going on in Britain between two camps: one calling for rigid measures to safeguard the language from contamination, suggesting the establishment of a body similar to the French Academy, to see to it that grammatically correct English is used. The other camp seems to be opposed to the idea of a standard English. They claim that standard English is elitist, sexist, and above all should not be offered to all and sundry. Protagonists of this stand call for the adoption of dialects by minorities or lower class people.

In an article published in the *Sunday Times*, Professor John Honey, who had previously proposed the "language tzar", is arguing about this subject. While in past articles he insisted on the teaching of grammar, he is now reviewing some ideas about this issue. This hostility to standard English has claimed a new victory, since the British government has "suspended the planned tests of the 14-year olds in grammar".

It seems that this campaign against standard English has been going on for three decades. According to this article, in 1993, 576 teachers of English signed an open letter protesting against the government's "disastrously reductive and mechanistic preoccupation with the technicalities of standard English in schools".

The teachers were supported a year later by the Council of University Teachers of English, when they were warned against privileging standard English in the curriculum. The Council argued that "this would enhance the power base of a particular social elite".

There is no doubt that not everyone can handle standard English with confidence. Probably what English needs is a process of simplification, doing away with many anomalies in the language. This will, certainly, help in the move to globalise English. The Americans have gone some way towards this, and have done away with some of the spelling idiosyncrasies.

Honey expresses his support of the standard English. He believes that standard English should be taught to users of dialects. *He claims that it was the* elite groups who brought in standard English to the working class. That elite consisted of "political radicals, humble clerics and teachers. They were inspired by a common desire to spread literacy".

Honey, who has published a book entitled *Language is Power* believes that standard English confers power. The new role of English "as the undisputed global language", he continues, "renders even more inappropriate the attempts to romanticize 'the tribal dialects' of local communities".

Honey is of the opinion that the central task of the education system should be transforming the availability of standard English for all children, especially the underprivileged and inarticulate.

I have come across a document which I believe is a parody, supposedly published by the European Union. It gives some examples of the simplification of English, proposing, for instance, replacing the hard "c" with a "k" and the "ph" with an "f". This *European Directive* calls for a five year phased plan to produce what should be called Euro-English!

Mursi Saad El-Din

Icons in the cellar

Incense burners and crosses, fabrics and woodwork, lecterns and icons have been gathering dust in the storerooms of the Coptic Museum for decades. **Sherine Nasr** expresses concern for the hidden relics



An ancient fresco featuring a cross is being restored through injection of special material *photo: Khaled El-Fiqi*

The 13th century icon of Archangel Michael is one of many relics kept in the Coptic Museum storerooms, but it is luckier than most. The assault of time on its quality and texture has been arrested and it is now being given the necessary restorative works. But hundreds of other artifacts are still kept in unfavorable conditions.

"The museum was built in 1910 and the planning for the storerooms was done with the mentality of that age," says Sobhi Shenouda, head of the museum's Restoration Department. "There was no suitable climate nor proper lighting," Shenouda adds.

To stop the decay of the stored relics, the museum set up its own restoration service two years ago, and the restorers found enough to do. Shenouda is proud of a restoration project undertaken two years ago under Dutch sponsorship. The restorers have so far repaired 26 icons in the Coptic Museum and in various churches in old Cairo.

Efforts have been made to modernise storage methods. Previously, all types of artifacts were kept together. Special boxes have been provided to separate icons, woodwork, textiles and other objects. Organic substances, such as fabrics, are sterilised regularly to keep away moths and insects. Temperature- and humidity-regulating devices are being introduced. The restorers keep an eye on the relics. "Items on the verge of decay are immediately moved to the laboratories for restoration," said Shenouda.

The museum possesses nearly 16,000 items of various types and ages, and their restoration is a considerable task that requires money, materials and, above all, expertise. And the task is not getting easier, as more excavations add to the number of artifacts in storage.

Shenouda points to nine main categories kept in the storerooms. There are many specimens of Coptic textiles, admired for their colour and designs. Also, wooden iconostasis, old gates and lecterns. "The most ancient iconostasis is that of St Barbara. It dates back to the 6th century. It was restored and is on display now," he said.

Metalwork is abundant: chalices, trays, incense burners, crosses, gold crowns, Bible covers, coins, household plates and cutlery. Shenouda points out to an impressive iron gate key with silver and copper engravings which was found in El-Deir El-Abyad, the white monastery.

Ceramics and frescoes, artifacts fashioned of bone and ivory, glass ornaments, leather items and manuscripts abound in the museum's storerooms. And, of course, the icons. One of the oldest, that of Saint Tadrus, an Egyptian martyr, dates to the 5th century. It has just been put on display following restorative work.

Some of the items currently in storage are expected to make it into the display halls. "We will choose items of historic importance to be displayed. They will be regularly replaced so as to give way to other items and so on," says Shenouda. The plan aims to boost the number of visitors and, consequently, the museum's income. Restoration will help make this development possible, as Shenouda points out. "There will always be something new to see. A wider range of items will stand a better chance of being restored for display."

Unfavourable storage conditions are just one of the museum's worries. Sarce restoration expertise is another. "The number of restorers is hardly adequate to the task," Shenouda says. It takes years of experience before a restorer can handle a piece safely. Precious items can be greatly damaged if the restorer uses the wrong material. Acetone, for example, although useful for stone works, is detrimental to icons. "Acetone absorbs water, therefore, while it would cause cracks to icon surfaces, it would take out humidity from stone surfaces and make them more solid," Shenouda explains.

Shenouda is optimistic about a joint scheme by the American Research Centre and the Dutch Embassy to survey and register all icons in the country and restore a selected number of these icons. "Once approved, this *will be the biggest effort yet to save Coptic* icons," he says.

Early morning with Ramses III



RAMSES III's mortuary temple in the Theban necropolis is not often free of visitors these days, especially following the publicity surrounding the recent opening of the Medinet Habu Complex within which it stand. President Hosni Mubarak attended the official opening after restoration of the entrance gateway. But photographer **Jihan Ammar** crossed the river from Luxor early in the day, and made her way to the temple to capture this photograph of the guard, the *ghaffir*, preparing for the influx of tourists.

Ramses III's temple contains some of the most magnificent festival and war scenes in the necropolis, including Ramses III's battle against the "People of the Sea," believed to be Sardinians. This impressive relief, depicting this people's crushing defeat at the hands of the Egyptians, is carved on the outer wall of the temple, so people would be reminded about their pharaoh's great victory.

Medieval Islamic city open to tourists

Tourists with keen interest in ancient Islamic sites can now enjoy a trip around Fuwah, the newly inaugurated and restored Islamic city in Kafr El-Sheikh Governorate. **Nevine El-Aref** reports

The Supreme Council of Antiquities (SCA) recently inaugurated Fuwah, Egypt's second largest city in the 15th century, as an open-air museum containing over a dozen Islamic monuments.

The SCA spent LE12 million restoring 15 Islamic monuments, now open to visitors, as well as upgrading the city's tourist facilities. In addition, an archaeological centre has been specially constructed in Fuwah to increase awareness amongst local inhabitants of their city's glorious past. This centre comprises a restoration unit, a small library containing archaeological books, a cinema and an institute for Islamic-style weaving. For tourists keen to view the archaeological area at night, a special lighting system has been installed.

According to Ali Hassan, secretary general of the SCA, this development project has taken four years to complete and has upgraded Fuwah's status to become a major site of Islamic antiquities. Within the project's framework, Fuwah's monuments have undergone an extensive face-lift to improve and restore the walls, wooden reliefs and decorative details. In addition, the foundations have been reinforced, ensuring the survival of monuments that date back to the Mameluke period and the era of Mohamed Ali.

Fuwah features splendid mosques, a *tekiyya*, a mausoleum and a tarboosh factory. Four of the 15 recently restored buildings are mosques, built mainly of brick and wood. These include Al-Numeiri Mosque (1743), which has a sundial on its roof, the Dayi Eddar Mosque with a minaret topped by an onion-shaped cupola, the Hassan Nasrallah Mosque with its decorative windows and splendid pulpit adorned with ancient Islamic script and finally, Abul-Makarem Mosque, which has an impressive dome.

Tourists can also visit the 13th century mausoleum of Abul-Nagah and the 18th century three-storey house of Rubaa El-Khatabeya, a residential building that includes workshops for spinning and carpentry. Another place of interest in the inaugurated site, which should draw visitors in droves, is the *Tekiyya* of El-Khalawateya with its Qur'anic school. The *tekiyya* was traditionally a place of worship with additional rooms set aside for visiting Muslim clerics, theologians and dervishes.

The entrance of a huge factory that once manufactured the tarboosh, the red cylindrical hat also known as the fez, has been restored. This factory, says Hassan, was used to produce the tarboosh worn by soldiers during the Ottoman era.

Fuwah is located in the governorate of Kafr El-Sheikh in the northern Delta. Although it originally dates back to the Ptolemaic era, it had its heyday during the reign of Mohamed Ali, when it rose to become a major industrial centre for tapestry and tarboosh. Sadly, the city then sank into oblivion and was only mentioned in passing in tourist guides as the ancient Greek town of Metelis. Now, the revival of Fuwah and the opening of the city to tourists augurs an exciting new future ahead.

The inauguration ceremony was attended by Farouk Hosni, the minister of culture and a number of Egyptologists, professors and restorers.

Site tours

Buses

Super Jet, East Delta and West Delta buses operate throughout Egypt.

Super Jet

Super Jet stations are located in Almaza (Heliopolis), Tahrir, Giza, Ramsis Street and Cairo Airport. Buses travel to Alexandria, Port Said, Hurghada and Sinai. Tel. 772-663.

Cairo-Alexandria
Services almost every half hour from 5.30am to 10pm, from Tahrir, then Giza, Almaza and the airport. Tickets LE19 until 9pm; LE21 thereafter; from the airport LE24 until 5pm; LE30 thereafter.
A VIP bus with phone access leaves Almaza at 7.15am. Tickets from Almaza LE28; from the airport LE32 each way.

Cairo-Marsa Matrouh
Services at 7am departure and 7pm return from Almaza and Tahrir Square. Tickets LE36.
Cairo-Sidi Abdel-Rahman
Services at 6.30am, 7am, 8am, 9am and 3.45pm. Tickets LE32
Cairo-Port Said
Services every half hour from 6am to 8am; then 9am, 10am, 3pm, and 4.30pm, from Almaza, then Ramsis Street. Tickets LE15 each way.

Alexandria-Port Said
Service 6.45am, from Ramleh Square in Alexandria. Departs Port Said 3.30pm. Tickets LE22 each way.

Cairo-Hurghada
Services 8am and 2pm, from Tahrir, then Giza and Almaza. Departs Hurghada noon and 5pm. Tickets LE40 until 5pm, LE45 thereafter, both each way.

Alexandria-Hurghada
Service 8pm, from Ramleh Square, Alexandria. Departs Hurghada 2.30pm. Tickets LE60 each way.
Cairo-Sharm El-Sheikh
Service 11pm, from Tahrir, then Almaza. Departs Sharm El-Sheikh 11pm. Tickets LE50 each way.

East Delta Bus Company
Buses travel to North/South Sinai
Sinai, Suez and Ismailia. Buses to Ismailia and Suez depart from Qulali (near Ramsis Square), Almaza and Tagnid Square (near Heliopolis). Buses to North and South Sinai depart from the Sinai bus station at Abbassiya Square. Tel. 482-4753.

Cairo-Ismailia
Services every 45 minutes from 6.30am to 6pm, from Qulali, then Almaza and Tagnid Square. Tickets deluxe bus LE5.75; air-conditioned bus LE5.25, one way.

Cairo-Suez
Services every half hour from 6am to 7pm, from Qulali, then Almaza and Tagnid Square. Tickets deluxe bus LE5.75; air-conditioned bus LE5, one way.

Cairo-El-Arish
Services every hour from 7.30am to 4pm, from Qulali, then Almaza and Tagnid Square. Tickets deluxe bus LE21; air-conditioned bus LE13, one way.

Cairo-Sharm El-Sheikh
Services every 45 min. from 7am to 6.30pm from Abbassiya, then Almaza. Tickets morning LE27; evening LE40, one way.

Cairo-Nuweiba
Service 8am, from Abbassiya, then Almaza. Tickets deluxe bus LE31.

West Delta Bus Company

Stations at Tahrir and Almaza. Tel. 243-1846.

Cairo-Hurghada
Services 9am, noon, 3pm, 10.30pm, 10.45pm and 11pm. Tickets LE30 one way.

Cairo-Safaga
Services 9am and 3pm. Tickets LE35 one way.
Cairo-Quseir
Service 10pm. Tickets LE38 one way.

Cairo-Luxor
Service 9am. Tickets LE35 one way.

Cairo-Aswan
Service 5pm. Tickets LE50 one way.

Trains

Trains run to Alexandria, Port Said, Luxor and Aswan, from Ramsis Station. Tel. 147 or 575-3555.

Cairo-Luxor-Aswan
"French" deluxe trains with sleepers
Services to Luxor and Aswan 7.40pm and 9pm (reaching Luxor 6.40 am and 8am, Aswan 8.40am and 10am). Tickets to Luxor LE294 for foreigners and LE129 for Egyptians, to Aswan LE300 for foreigners, LE141 for Egyptians.
"Spanish" deluxe trains without sleepers
Services to Luxor and Aswan 6.45pm, 8.45pm and 9.45pm. Tickets to Luxor: first class LE51; second class LE31. Tickets to Aswan: first class LE63, second class LE37.

Cairo-Alexandria
"Torbini" trains
VIP train: Service 8am. Tickets first class LE32 with a meal; LE22 without a meal.
Standard trains: Services 9am, 11am, noon, 5pm and 7pm. Tickets first class LE22; second class LE17.
"French" trains
Services hourly from 6am to 10.30pm. Tickets first class LE20; second class LE12.

Cairo-Port Said
Services 6.20am and 8.45am. Tickets first class LE45; second class LE26.

EgyptAir

There are between two and five domestic flights daily. Check EgyptAir: Adly 390-0999; Opera 390-2444; or Hilton 772410.

Cairo-Aswan
Tickets LE351 for Egyptians, LE1143 for foreigners, both round-trip.

Cairo-Luxor
Tickets LE259 for Egyptians, LE829 for foreigners, both round-trip.

Cairo-Hurghada
Tickets LE379 for Egyptians, LE898 for foreigners, both round-trip.

Cairo-Sharm El-Sheikh
Tickets LE287 for Egyptians, LE945 for foreigners, both round-trip.

Egyptian tourism on the Internet

Here are some useful addresses on the Internet, including tourism magazines, archaeology and travel agency programmes

http:// www.idsc.gov.eg/links.htm is an address through which you can access other useful tourism addresses on the Internet. Here they are:

http://www.idsc.gov.eg/tourism is the address of Egypt's Tourism Net which provides directories of Egypt's hotels, restaurants, cruise lines, travel agents, transportation companies and tourist attractions. Egypt's tourism net is a part of many home pages (culture, health, environment, etc) created by the IDSC as a part of the nation's *Information Highway*.

http://163.121.10.41/tourism is the key to Egypt Has It All, where Egypt's tourist sites, such as the Red Sea, Cairo, Luxor, Aswan, the Sinai, Alexandria, oases and ETA offices abroad are described. The magazine also contains colour photographs of Egypt.

http://www.memphis.edu/egypt/egypt.htm is the address of the University of Memphis, and describes their projects in Egypt.

http://www-ceg.ceg.uiuc.edu/~haggag/travel.html is the address of Egypt's Tours and Travel, which organises packages for people who want to take quality tours. It is an Egyptian tour operator, which specialises in tours within Egypt, the Holy Land and the Middle East.

http://www.geocities.com/The Tropics/7210 is the address of The Curse of the Pharaohs. It includes photographs of ancient tombs and temples.

http://www.ecy.be/horses is the address of The Arabian Horse Worldwide Guide. This guide aims to promote the world's most beautiful and versatile horse — the Arabian.
http://intercoz.com/egypt is a 2,000-page magazine, published by the Ministry of Tourism, where all Egyptian tourist sites are listed and described.
http://www.datum.com.eg/~city is the address of the magazine *Cairo Scene*, Cairo's first on-line art and entertainment guide. It is the most up-to-date source on where to go and what to do in Cairo. It has also sections for books and the latest CDs besides proposed places to visit like Wadi Rayan.
http://watt.seas.virginia.edu/~aou5v is the site of Exodus Egypt, a daily site covering home news including political, social and cultural events.

Sunny summer deals

Hotels and travel agencies are offering special prices for summer. Prices are valid for Egyptians and foreign residents

Travel agencies

New City Travel is offering trips to Paris, London, Damascus and Beirut. Trips to Paris go for LE1890 for 8 days including accommodation on breakfast basis. Another 15-day trip combines Paris and London for LE3990 including accommodation in three-star hotels including open buffet breakfast. A week trip to Damascus and Beirut costs LE2090. The price includes accommodation in four-star hotels on breakfast basis.

Hotels

Cairo
Pyramids Park Hotel, an Inter-Continental global partner resort, is offering a single room for LE160 and a double for LE180 including service fees and taxes, 20 per cent discount on all food items, free shuttle bus to city centre and free use of the exercise room. Prices are valid until October.
Sonesta Hotel Cairo is offering double rooms for LE220 and singles for LE200 including breakfast and taxes.

South Sinai
Sharm El-Sheikh
Sonesta Beach Resort Sharm El-Sheikh is offering a rate of LE260 for double rooms and LE190 for single rooms including breakfast, taxes and services.
Coral Bay Resort is offering a rate of LE120 per person for double rooms and is also offering a rate of LE700 for 7 nights including breakfast. Prices are valid until September.

Dahab
Novotel Dahab is offering a rate of LE200 per person for double rooms for three days including breakfast buffet. The offer is valid until September 1997.

Red Sea
Sonesta Beach Resort Hurghada is offering a rate of LE266 for double rooms and LE210 for singles on half-board basis including taxes and service charge.

Compiled by **Rehab Saad**



Seeing through the suds

What do *musalsalat* — the television serials that keep the nation glued to the small screen night after night — really have to say? **Lila Abu-Lughod** tunes in

On a high floor of the Television Building in Maspero, the windows are wide open to let the smoke out into the night air. Around a large table, presided over by Egypt's best-known television writer, Osama Anwar Okasha and Gamal Abdel-Hamid, the director who collaborated with him on his last hit, *Arabesque*, sit many of the actors I have been watching on television for years. The main actresses sit together. They are well-dressed and their make-up is as perfect as on television. The young actors sit against the back wall, eating potato chips and whispering. Some of the male actors look more rumpled than they do on screen. But what brings them all down to earth is that they are wearing reading glasses. It is 11 March 1997, and they are going over the final episodes of the script for Okasha's new serial, *Zizinya*. Filming was to begin in April and we can expect to see the serial next Ramadan.

As in many countries, television in Egypt is state-run. Serialised dramas like *Zizinya* — even though they are a form of entertainment — relate to national politics and social concerns. They sometimes offer surprising forms of political criticism.

In the 1980s and 1990s, as Egypt opened itself to foreign investment, tried to conform to the demands of the international financial institutions, and welcomed McDonald's, Islamism was becoming an appealing alternative for a broad mass of people. Although most of those who are sympathetic to this assertion of Islamic identity and piety have peacefully incorporated it into their everyday lives, violent confrontation between members of Islamic militant groups and government forces became disturbingly regular beginning in 1991. Television serials have reacted to these events and social transformations. But not in any straightforward way, as Okasha's most widely loved serial, "Hilmiya Nights", illustrates.

"Hilmiya Nights" was unique in many ways. It was made up of five parts and over 150 episodes. Most serial are only 15 episodes long. It was also uniquely ambitious in its subject matter. Set in the old Cairo neighbourhood of Hilmiya, it followed the lives and fortunes of a group of characters (from aristocrats to ordinary working people) from the 1940s, when Egypt was under the yoke of British occupation and a corrupt monarchy, right up to the present.

Like all soap operas, it took us into the personal lives and relationships of its characters. But unlike most soap operas in other countries, and even most Egyptian serials, it linked its personal stories of loyalty and betrayal, thwarted desire, ambition fulfilled, and tragic love to Egyptian national political events: its revolutions, its wars, its presidents and their policies. Although people were drawn to it for its colourful characters and emotional drama, it provoked heated debate among the intelligentsia because it offered a particularly sharp commentary on the path Egypt had taken over the past fifteen years.

Islamism and television

This serial provides confirmation that, despite state control of the media, the best producers of Egyptian television have a certain independence. The messages of "Hilmiya Nights" about patriotism and national unity across classes, as well as its basically secular vision of modern Egypt, may have been well within the bounds of government policy and dreams. But its veiled criticism in Part 3 of the president who made peace with Israel and opened up the country to foreign investment and unregulated capitalism, policies the current government has carried on, were controversial. Television censors tried to block these scenes but in the end, after Okasha's public show of anger, the Minister of Information overrode their decisions. There were limits to what Okasha could say, though. What were considered too sensitive to broadcast in Part 3 were scenes in a mosque dramatising what the writer describes as "the seeds of terrorism". In line with government policies until 1992, television drama had to remain silent about the Islamic alternative that was so much a part of everyday life. No serial showed women wearing modest dress. No serial depicted youth as religions, despite the fact that university students all over Egypt were joining Islamic organisations. Religious programming increased and the calls to prayer interrupted the serials. But religion was segregated from the popular serials, as if to compartmentalise it. It was something meaningful to the individual and respected by the state, but not relevant to the social reality and political future of Egypt.

But then everything changed. "Hilmiya Nights" both led the way and revealed the shift, though again it took its own path. For the first time, television's silence on the Islamic movement was broken. Part 4 of "Hilmiya Nights", produced in 1992 and depicting the 1980s, included an important subplot about a "religious extremist". Not surprisingly, the modernist nationalist writer, who describes himself as "anti-theocratic", did not present this Islamist in a positive light. One of the characters became deeply involved with a group at the mosque and eventually disappeared. When he reappeared, it was as a fugitive banging on his step-mother's door and begging her to hide him. He had, he confessed, killed someone while robbing a jewellery store. His leaders had convinced him that it was fine to rob in the name of Islam for their cause, but he had not intended the murder. Part 4 of "Hilmiya Nights" had coincided conveniently with a policy shift in media treatments of the Islamists. Egypt's long-standing minister of information, Safwat El-Sherif, had begun making pronouncements about the crucial importance of using the media to "confront terrorism". In April 1993, he himself became the target of "terrorism". He escaped with only a hand injury, but then began to appear frequently at news conferences, on television, and in photographs — his hand still bandaged — calling with redoubled energy for this use of the media.

Then the serials began to appear. These were blatant in their attempts to discredit militant Islamists, portraying them not only as hypocrites but as fundamentally misguided, stupidly violent, and agents of foreign powers. In the past four years, soap opera viewers could be forgiven for thinking that it has become obligatory to include scenes of bearded white-robed extremists. These young men terrorise neighbourhoods, force women into marriages, beg and steal, sell out their relatives, try to kill those who oppose them, and do such improbable things as mistake appreciation of ancient Pharaonic culture for idol worship. The major Ramadan production of 1994, *The Family* (which had been rejected four years earlier by censors), initiated the most popular new narrative technique: pitting good, proper, official understandings of Islam against the misreading and misinterpretations of uneducated Islamic extremists. The serial was organised around dialogues about the correct interpretation of Islam between a reasonable school headmaster and a religious militant of lower-class origins. It appeared with such fanfare that one viewer described it as "a serial we had to like".

Faith and money

Despite superficial similarities, these new didactic serials portray Islamism very differently from "Hilmiya Nights". First, of course, they are heavy-handed, with none of the subtlety and humour of so many of Okasha's serials. More importantly, although "Hilmiya Nights" showed that extremism was wrong, it had a more serious target. The unpleasant extremist of "Hilmiya Nights" was sympathetically placed in context — as part of a generation that had gone astray because it found itself in a corrupt society with no ideals, in a country with no national spirit and that offered its youth no mission or role models. In the end this young man realised he had gone wrong. He asked God for forgiveness. He realised his step-mother loved him. And he turned himself in to the police for his crime.

Like many of the best television serials of the 1980s and 1990s, produced by a cohort of writers and directors who came of political age under President Nasser and the dreams of Arab socialism, the real target of the social criticism of "Hilmiya Nights" was the kind of society Egypt was becoming. The finger was pointed at the corruption and immorality of the new entrepreneurs trying to make money by any means (embezzling, bribing, importing banned food, and dealing in heroin). These are the fat cats who benefited from the Infitah policies and that one sees driving around Cairo in shiny Mercedes while the poor cannot afford apartments, the squeezed middle class cannot find jobs, and the temptations to compromise one's principles for survival are resisted only with great effort. These have been the subjects of many of Okasha's serials, including his most recent, the 1997 "Our Folks" (*Ahaleena*).

And so, although censors may have welcomed Okasha's version of the young extremist, the writer's own political inclinations for separating state and religion conveniently meshing with government anxiety about terrorisim, they have not been able to accommodate so easily some of his other characters and themes. This is despite the bold (and in so many ways justified) claims about more and more freedom of expression in the media. The most recent confrontation between Okasha and the censors came with Part 5, the final installment of "Hilmiya Nights". Covering the mid-1990s, it was unpopular with critics and audiences alike. People complained that it was boring. The critics complained that it lacked a clear message. Okasha still defends it, though, charging the censors with having ruined it. The main theme was to have been the alliance between money and power. Okasha says the censors cut crucial scenes showing secret deals between the families of high government officials and big businessmen. These were too politically sensitive.











VARIATIONS ON A THEME: Most *musalsalat* carry some social message for the masses. The most popular storylines revolve around the triumph of innocence and honesty in the face of greed and corruption. Clockwise from top: Lucy and Mohsena Tawfiq in "Hilmiya Nights"; *Abul-Ela El-Bishri* — utopian dreams in an age of vulgarity; Yehia Fakharani in "Rabi's Second Half": a love story served as the platform for a lesson on corruption; Faten Hamama and Abla Kamel in *Damir Abla Hikmat* (Miss Hikmat's Conscience), another tale of idealism in the face of crass adversity; *Hilm Al-Ganoubi* (The Southerner's Dream), which drove home the message of education as the great improver, representing salvation for the honest, virtuous Upper Egyptian

A voice of his own

To appease the talented writers and directors who work for television, at an official forum on television drama held in February, Safwat El-Sherif praised Egypt's writers as the "conscience of the nation". But Okasha, joined by other outspoken writers like Fathiya El-Assal, would not be silenced. They lambasted those in charge for ignoring the primary obstacle to creativity: censorship. If, as these officials hoped, Egyptian television was to be able to compete with satellite, it had to allow artistic freedom. For Okasha, a writer who went into television because it could reach more people than literature, and who hopes his drama will inspire them to speak up about their problems and make demands, censors are like prison wardens, guarding not just writers but the minds of the people.

Still, Egypt is unusual in the extent to which socially concerned and politically progressive writers like Okasha can produce for television. Islamists are not so fortunate. They are excluded from official media production and are now depicted negatively in the popular evening serials. But they seem to be having some influence on television. The general appeal of a growing Islamic identity ad a morality to match may have made censors more sensitive about sexual content. Most people who make television serials say they are so tame because they have to be sold to the more conservative Arab Gulf states. But the Islamic press often accuses television of being immoral, and there can be no doubt that respectable audiences at home — especially now that the elite who know foreign languages are beginning to abandon state television for satellite — are probably more comfortable with this avoidance of sexuality.

Moreover, Islamism seems to have encouraged television, somewhat defensively, to broadcast more religious programming. Moderate religious programmes are fairly uncontroversial in a nation of everyday piety. More important, they are helpful in the state's attempt to wrest religious authority away from Islamic groups and appropriate it for itself. The newly appointed head of the production sector, Yehya El-Alami, one of Egypt's top television directors, has noted the growing popularity of religious/historical serials and says they plan to produce many more in the coming years.

Okasha worries about television's strategy of "waving Qur'ans", eagerly claiming to be good Muslims, and submitting more and more scripts to the censorship of Al-Azhar. As he wrote in an article several years ago in the weekly magazine *Rose El-Youssef*, he thinks television serials should take on a different task. They should "salvage what remains of our identity as Egyptians, of that Egyptian who emerged from the soil of this land and the waters of the Nile, that Egyptian who has taste and appreciates art and history". Indeed, Okasha's next big serial after "Hilmiya Nights" was about a confused artisan, dedicated to his authentic art and confronting the troubles of our time. Called *Arabesque*, after the Islamic-Arab design, the serial closed with a question: Who are we? Are we Arabs? Are we Pharaohs? Are we Mediterraneans?

Okasha says that *Zizinya* is his answer. It will be in three parts. Like "Hilmiya Nights", it is set in a popular neighbourhood. This time, the city is not Cairo but Alexandria, that crossroads of the Mediterranean. And as with "Hilmiya Nights", it begins in the 1940s. But, unlike "Hilmiya Nights", it is not about national unity and Egypt's historical trajectory, but about identity. What happened, it asks, when Greeks, Armenians, and Italians lived side by side with Egyptians? Who affected whom? Which culture dominated? Okasha is inspired by the theories of Gamal Hamdan, whose tome on the "genius of place" likens Egypt to a large stomach whose enzymes digest foreign cultures, creating the unique hybrid, "the Egyptian personality".

This concern with identity seems to be Okasha's double response to the powerful assertions of Islamic identity and to the equally troubling consumerism, corruption, and apparent loss of concern by the government and the elite for the ordinary person. He says he wants his television serials to make people think. "Hilmiya Nights" took Egyptians through their past (and has become a cherished part of this past). Now, Okasha wants them to think about their future.

Where is Egypt going? "To know what we want," he says, "we must first know who we are."

Dr Lila Abu-Lughod teaches Anthropology at New York University. She has written two books on the Awlad 'Ali Bedouin on the northwest coast, and is now writing a book about the cultural politics of Egyptian television serials.



The "World Cup" is coming to Egypt. We set the stage for the young lions of five continents as they prepare to do battle for the 1997 Under-17 World Championships — amongst them our very own "Team of Hope". A comprehensive preview of all four venues by the *Weekly*'s own reporters


Egypt's "Team of Hope" line up for history — the first Egyptian team ever to play in a World Championship in their homeland *photo: Hossam Diab*

Venue A

Tonight at 8:30 pm the Egyptian Youth Team, known to their followers throughout the country as "The Team of Hope", will inaugurate the Fourth U-17 World Championship when they play their first group A match against Thailand at the Cairo Stadium.

The 80,000-seater city stadium was the obvious choice for the gala opening ceremony and the subsequent matches of group A.

Will the youngsters stumble and fall by the wayside, just like their older colleagues in the senior team? Or will they reward their fans and restore Egyptians' faith in their national sport? According to "The Team of Hope"'s coach, Dr. Mohamed Ali, nothing is impossible. As he told *Al-Ahram Weekly*: "Despite all the difficulties we may face, we have confidence in ourselves and we believe that if we strive hard, we will reach the final, if not win". However, only last week, they lost the first of their two friendly matches against Bahrain, raising doubts as to whether they would even manage to reach the quarter-finals. Dr. Ali, however, believes such criticisms are misplaced: "We won the second match 2-1. Losing the first one was not due to the team's poor performance. It was a consequence of experimental alterations I made several times during the match, and of the players' fear of unwanted injuries".

As the host country, Egypt qualified automatically for the World Championship. Yet these young players, who are ranked 33rd in the world and are seeded 12th in the Championship, have earned their place on the field by their triumphant progress through the African Nations Cup. In the qualifying rounds they defeated Tunisia 5-2 in the first leg and 2-1 in the second leg, and then played Guinea, winning 2-0 on aggregate after a goalless draw in the first leg. Having reached the competition proper, they beat Botswana 2-0 and held Mali to a goalless draw to go through to the quarter-finals, where they beat Cote d' Ivoire 2-0. A 1-0 victory over Ethiopia brought them to the finals, where a single goal secured them victory over Mali, and the Cup itself.

Fixtures		
Thurs 4/9	Egypt v Thailand	20.30
Fri 5/9	Chile v Germany	20.30
Sun 7/9	Egypt v Chile Thailand v Germany	18.15 20.30
Wed 9/9	Thailand v Chile Egypt v Germany	18.15 20.30

It was their success where the senior team had failed that led the fans to dub them "The Team of Hope". After all, these talented teenagers might one day grow up to become the national senior team and represent Egypt in the World Cup. That is why many Egyptians are looking forward to this junior World Championship with the same excitement as if it were the World Cup itself.

Since "The Team of Hope" clinched the African Nations title, they have been in intensive training. Their programme included two foreign training camps in Romania and Holland. For the last week, Dr. Ali has been concentrating on team psychology and exploring different tactics. Training sessions have been reduced to once a day rather than twice. The 18 players in the championship squad were selected from a pool of 40 of Egypt's best club players. They are Ahmed Ikrami (son of the retired Ahli goalkeeper), Ahmed Sabri (Zamalek), Mohamed Sami (El-Croum), Gamal Abul-Khair (Zamalek), Mostafa Ali (Ahli), Yasser Hassan (Ahli), Mohamed El-Hefnawi (Zamalek), Ashraf Abdel-Latif (Zamalek), Amr Ahmed (El Masry), Mohamed Abul-Ela (Zamalek), Ashraf Saleh (Ahli), El-Khatib Mosleh (Mansoura), Hani Zakaria (Ahli), Mohamed El-Etrawi (Mahalla), Ahmed Belal (Ahli), Arabi Mahmoud (Mansoura), and Mohamed Zahran (Port Said).

Egypt have drawn Thailand, Chile and Germany as their adversaries in group A. They know the Thais well, having played against them in a four-cornered tournament which Thailand hosted last March. Then, as against Bahrain, Egypt's performance was uneven: they lost their first match 2-0, only to come back and beat their hosts 1-0 in the final. To judge by the fight the Thais put up to get to the Championship, they are a force to be reckoned with. In the preliminary qualifying rounds, they routed India 7-0, beat Iran 3-0 and Bahrain 4-2, and drew with China 1-1. In the semi-finals, they went on to beat Japan 1-0, but they were less fortunate in the final, where they lost 1-0 to Oman. Their preparation has included friendly matches against teams from Poland, Bulgaria, Russia, Bahrain and Oman.

Chile and Germany are both something of an unknown quantity. Dr. Ali said: "We will study them when they play against each other on Friday and we'll put our plan together on the basis of what we see then".

Chile is ranked 20th in the world, and this is the second time they have taken part in the U-17 World Championship. The first time was in Japan in 1993, when they came third. However, they only qualified for this year's tournament by the skin of their teeth. In their qualifying group, they first drew 1-1 with Brazil and then lost 1-0 to Uruguay, before picking up to demolish Bolivia 7-1 and defeat Colombia 1-0. In the final rounds their performance was even more ropey: they lost 3-0 to Argentina and 5-3 to Brazil, with only a single 2-1 victory over Paraguay to see them through. Such a track record suggests they will not present Egypt with many difficulties.

The Germans have a long history of participation in the tournament, but their performance has progressively deteriorated over the years. Their best result to date was on their first appearance, in the 1985 U-16 World Championship in China, where they were runners-up. In the first U-17 championship in Italy in 1991 they were placed eighth, and in Ecuador in 1995 they came 11th. However, they showed their determination to make their mark on this year's championship in their qualifying matches in the European group. The preliminary rounds saw them beat Israel 3-0, Switzerland 2-0 and Northern Ireland 1-0. In the quarter-finals, they enjoyed a comfortable 3-1 victory over Hungary. The only match they lost was against Spain in the semi-finals (2-1), but they still managed to go on and beat Switzerland 3-1 in the finals, thus claiming their place in the World Championship in Egypt.

Venue B

Fixtures		
Sat 6/9	New Zealand v Mali Mexico v Spain	18.15 20.30
Mon 8/9	Mali v Spain New Zealand v Mexico	18.15 20.30
Thurs 11/9	Mali v Mexico New Zealand v Spain	18.15 20.30

The charming canal town of Ismailia and its 15,000-seater stadium will provide the backdrop for what seems set to be a fiery confrontation between four talented young teams: Mexico, Spain, New Zealand and Mali.

Mexico

The four teams in group B all qualified in style, picking up only a single defeat between them through their qualifying rounds. In the case of Mexico, this meant playing six flawless matches in group two. They warmed up by beating Honduras 3-0, then really hit their form, demolishing Martinique 7-0 and Guatemala 5-1. This set them up well for the round-robin final, in which they managed three more modest, yet still decisive victories: 3-1 against the USA, 4-0 against Costa Rica and 1-0 against Canada. Mexico thus arrived in Egypt for the World Cup having conceded only two goals in the preliminary stages, and having scored 23.

Spain

Spain's progress was impressive, too, even if their victories were rarely as crushing as those of Mexico. They began by routing Ukraine 6-1, then fell back to narrower margins, beating Poland 2-1, and Austria 2-0. In the quarter-finals, they defeated Slovakia 3-1 to reach the semi-final and score a 2-1 victory over Germany. This brought them face to face with Austria once again. The second match was tighter than the first: at full time, the two teams were still tied 0-0. The result was finally decided by a penalty shoot-out, which Spain won 5-4.

New Zealand

New Zealand's qualifying campaign began in magisterial style, as they thrashed Vanuatu mercilessly, winning 8-1. The Solomon Islands proved to be slightly more demanding opposition, but not too demanding, the New Zealanders winning 3-0. They then defeated Western Samoa 1-0 in a tough match, taking them into the semi-final against Fiji, which they won 2-0. In the final they met their arch-rivals, Australia: a 1-0 victory was sufficient to secure New Zealand a place in the World Cup .

Mali

As runner-up in the recent African championships, Mali was assured of qualifying alongside Egypt and Ghana. This will be their first appearance in the U-17 World Cup.


Special training for the Brazilian team *photo: Aref Saad El-Din*

Venue C

Alexandria

Alexandria was named after the Macedonian leader Alexander the Great, who founded the city in 332 BC. He chose the village of Rakhotis as the site for the city. Rakhotis had been a cult centre of Osiris between the island of Pharaos and lake Mareotis. Impressed by its excellent harbour and strategic location as gateway to both Egypt and the Mediterranean, he ordered his architects Dinocrates and Sosatrus to build a city there, the first of 60 around the world which now bear his name. Under the Ptolemies, a dynasty that ruled for the next 300 years, the city grew rapidly and became an international centre for trade, culture and learning. The Alexandria library was constructed during this period. In 48 BC, Julius Caesar brought the city under nominal Roman control, and after his death, Cleopatra allied herself with Mark Anthony, heir apparent to the Roman Empire, and the two ruled from Alexandria until they were defeated in 31 BC at Actium by Octavian. They committed suicide the following year, and Alexandria fell completely under Roman control. By this time, the cosmopolitan city was home to large Jewish and Greek communities. It was also the centre of Christianity in Egypt, brought to the country by St. Mark, and from there it spread throughout the rest of the country. Threatened with martyrdom by the Romans, Alexandria's Copts welcomed the Arab invasion in the summer of 642 AD. Alexandria declined under Arab rule, eclipsed by Cairo, the new capital city, and it was only under Mohamed Ali, who ruled Egypt from 1805 to 1849, that the city was completely revitalised, being used as a base for the Khedive's fleet. Alexandria continued to grow until its population exceeded 100,000 in the mid 19th century. Today more than 4 million people live in Alexandria.

Fixtures:		
Sat 6/9	Oman v USA Austria v Brazil	13.45 16.00
Mon 8/9	USA v Brazil Oman v Austria	13.45 16.00
Thur 11/9	Oman v Brazil USA v Austria	13.45 16.00
Sun 14/9	Winner Group C v Runner-up	16.00

Four teams are lining up to do battle in Alexandria Stadium over the next 10 days — Brazil, Austria, the USA and Oman. Here we analyse their recent form.

Brazil

As befits a country with a reputation for football supremacy, the Brazil Under-17 team qualified for Group C with flying colours, emerging unbeaten from the South American qualifying rounds. Their record speaks for itself: in the first round, they drew against Chile 1-1, beat Bolivia 4-0, drew with Colombia 1-1 and beat Uruguay 2-1. In the second round, they trounced Paraguay 5-0, before going on to overcome both Chile 5-3 and Argentina 2-1, thus winning the championship by a decisive margin. Their past form is equally impressive. In the last U-17 World Cup in Ecuador in 1995, they finished runners-up after losing in the final to Ghana. In both 1989 and 1991 they were placed sixth, though in 1993 they suffered the humiliation of failing to qualify. After their success in the South American championship, the team took a month off before travelling to Atlanta in the USA, where they played in a 4-cornered friendly tournament, comfortably beating Argentina and the United States, but losing once again to their old adversaries, Ghana. In order to acclimatise in preparation for Alexandria, the team has spent the last week training in Ismailia, where they played and won a friendly match against Ismailia Under-18s.

Brazil may be the favourites to win their group, but that does not mean the task ahead of them is easy. As Carlos Cesar, the Brazilian coach, explained: "I don't think it's an easy group. We met the USA team in the Atlanta friendlies and we beat them 1-0, but we don't know anything about Austria or Oman. We haven't even seen them play before". So there may yet be a few surprises in store.

USA

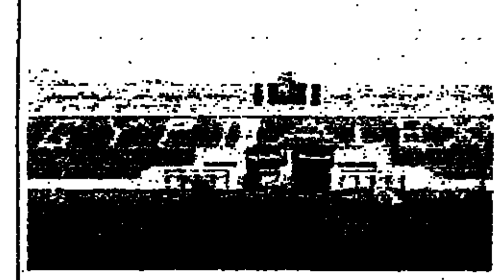
The USA team did not have such an easy ride through the North American qualifying rounds as Brazil did in theirs. They began well enough, beating the Bermudas 5-0 and the Dominican Republic 3-0, but then lost 3-2 to Costa Rica. In the final round, they lost 3-1 to Mexico, beat Canada 2-0 and then restored some of their pride with a 1-1 draw with Costa Rica. In the last U-17 World Cup, they were placed fifteenth. Their best result to date was fifth in Italy in 1991.

Oman

Asian football may be less celebrated than the South American game, but Oman's progress to the fourth U-17 World Cup has been as faultless as that of Brazil. In their all-Asian qualifying group, they beat Kazakhstan 4-1, drew 0-0 with Qatar and 2-2 with Japan. They then went on to beat Uzbekistan 6-1 and the Korean Republic 3-1. In the semi-finals they beat Bahrain 1-0. In the finals, two 1-0 victories over Thailand and Kuwait were enough to guarantee them a place in their second junior World Cup. On their first appearance in Ecuador in 1995, they impressed by coming fourth.

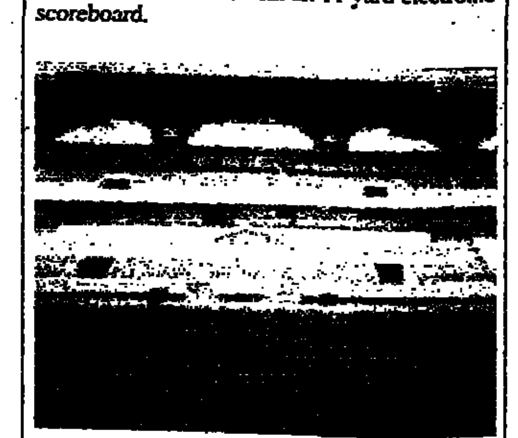
Austria

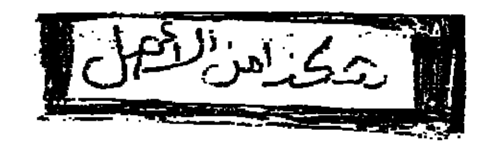
This is the first time an Austrian team has made it to the U-17 World Cup. In the European qualifying rounds, they beat Poland 4-0 and Ukraine 2-0, before losing 2-0 to Spain. In the quarter-final, they scored a convincing 3-0 victory over Turkey, but the semi-final against Switzerland proved more difficult, and they only went through after winning the penalty shoot-out 6-5. They lost to Spain in the final, also on penalties (4-5), but their aggregate performance was still good enough to ensure them a place in the competition.


Alexandria Stadium
Opened in 1929 especially for the first Mediterranean Games, it is located in the Sharq district. The seating capacity is 22,000, and the pitch area is 105m x 67m. The pitch is laid with Ugandan grass.


Port Said Stadium
Opened in 1954 on 23rd of July Street with a seating capacity of 30,510. This stadium has witnessed many crucial matches between underdog teams battling to remain in the league. The stadium is in very good condition and has an electronic scoreboard.


Cairo Stadium
Cairo Stadium was opened in 1960. Its seating capacity is 80,000. It has been the scene of many crucial encounters between Egypt's two powerhouses, Ahli and Zamalek. The playing area is 106m x 68m, with an 11 yard electronic scoreboard.


Ismailia Stadium
Ismailia Stadium was opened in 1924 with a seating capacity of 30,000. The stadium has been renovated for the U-17 World Championship. The pitch area is 105m x 70m.










Bahrain, Ghana, and Argentina training in Egypt

Photos: Aref Saad El-Din

Venue D


Ghana: Afrianie


Costa Rica: Chacon

Bahrain: Amin


Argentina: Peckerman


Brazil: Cesar

Port Said

An eye for an eye, a striker for a striker, a coach for a coach and a team for a team. Port Said will witness a fierce struggle between teams as they battle it out for first place in the championship.

The city

Port Said was founded in 1860 as a harbour on the Mediterranean coast at the northern end of the Suez Canal. The physical and socio-economic character of the city has persisted until the present day.

During the 1920s Port Said became an international trade centre because of the opportunities offered by the Suez Canal. In 1976 Port Said was declared a free trade zone. Imported goods are free from taxation which greatly favoured interior tourism. Port Said is still known to many Egyptians as *El-Baselah*, meaning 'the brave', for withstanding so many wars, especially the 1956 war against Egypt by Britain, France and Israel.

Teams

Argentina — Ghana — Costa Rica — Bahrain

Group D is considered the toughest group in this World Cup. Ghana, the title holders, are considered the best under-17 team in the world. Argentina, Bahrain and Costa Rica (who have won Port Saidi support) are all taking this competition seriously and it promises to be an interesting, closely-fought event.

Ghana

Ghana have played three times in the final and were twice World Champions, in 1991 and 1995. *They ranked no 2 in the world in the under-17* FIFA ratings. Ghana's junior football team has nurtured players such as Abedi Pele and Anthony Yeboah.

After winning the previous cup in Ecuador in 1995, Ghana sent the then under-15 team to a football academy. Over the past two years the junior footballers have been well nurtured, given real training and fed healthy food to guarantee a strong African team. "Europe can find healthy food easily," said Emanuel Kwasi Afrianie, Ghana's head coach. "If we didn't run this academy for the juniors, the players would not *follow a well-organised nutrition programme.* It's Africa not Europe," he said. Afrianie picked the team after watching 10 under-17 teams representing 10 regions in Ghana play.

Fixtures		
Fri 5/9	Argentina v Ghana Costa Rica v Bahrain	13.45 16.00
Sun 7/9	Ghana v Bahrain Argentina v Costa Rica	13.45 16.00
Wed 10/9	Ghana v Costa Rica Argentina v Bahrain	13.45 16.00

In preparation for the cup, Ghana played a friendly tournament in Atlanta, USA, with Brazil, Nigeria and USA. They won the tournament, beating Brazil 2-0, Nigeria 3-0 and the USA 3-2. They also played seven matches in Ghana against the senior team, junior team, Olympic team and the champion club, Hearts of Oak. *The under-17 team won all matches. In* the African qualification matches for the World Cup Under-17, Africa was divided into two groups. In Group A, Ghana beat Ethiopia 4-1, Zimbabwe 2-0 and Angola 3-1. In the semi-finals, they lost to Mali 1-2 and came in third place after beating Ethiopia 1-0.

Argentina

Argentina ranked no. 4 in the Under-17 FIFA rankings. Argentina qualified in all the World Cup Under-16 and Under-17 matches. They came in 9th place in China in 1985 and in 1989 they came 8th. In *Italy in 1991, they improved their position* when they came 3rd, and in 1995 they won 3rd place, too. In Japan in 1993, they dropped to 9th place.

Their preliminary matches were very promising. In its group, A, Argentina qualified for the finals after beating Venezuela 6-0, Ecuador 3-2, Peru 2-0 and losing 0-2 to Paraguay. In the finals, Argentina cruised to second place by beating Chile 3-0, drew with Paraguay and then lost to Brazil 1-2. Santo Guillermo scored 12 *goals in the preliminaries and Milito Gabriel,* the team's captain, scored eight goals.

Argentina's coach José Nestor Peckerman has won the respect of all Port Saidis as a serious and creative coach. Peckerman depends on the team as a whole and not on individual talents.

Bahrain

This is only the second time that Bahrain have participated in the Under-17 World Championship; the first time was in Scotland in 1989 where they finished in 4th place.

In the qualifying matches they first beat Turkmenistan 6-1 and Jordan 1-0 in Group A. Then India beat them 3-2 in Group B and they beat China 6-0. They lost 2-4 to Thailand and beat Iran 2-1. In the semi-finals they lost to Oman 0-1 and drew 0-0 with Japan. Head coach of Bahrain, Abdel-Aziz Amin, has been *training the Bahraini under-17 team, the senior* national team and his club team for more than 20 years. He expects to do well in this championship.

Costa Rica

This is the third Under-17 World Championship *for Costa Rica.* The first was in China in 1985 where they finished in 16th place. The second championship was in Ecuador 1995 where by they finished in 13th place.

Costa Rica came third in the preliminary *matches in America. In their group,* Costa Rica beat Dominican RP 2-1, Bermudas 8-1, USA 3-2. Then the winners of the groups played a round-robin game. They beat Canada 3-1, lost 0-4 to Mexico and drew 1-1 with USA.

In preparation for the championship, the Costa Rica coach, Armando Rodriguez Chacon, made *them play around 30 matches with Brazil, Chile,* Jamaica, USA and Austria. They won 20 matches, drew in 5 and lost 5. He considers Group D challenging since Ghana will fight to keep the title. Argentina is a strong team and Bahrain is well prepared. He welcomed the support of the Egyptian fans in Port Said and thinks this will lift the players' spirit.

Chacon, 39, has been training this team for a year and eight months. He has been coaching for 18 years and was the under-17 team coach in the World Cup in China in 1985 and in Ecuador in *1995. He predicts that two mid-fielders, Rodolfo* Rodriguez Mojica and Eric Lopez Mejias, and two strikers, Esteban Santana Morales and Jose Humberto Ugarte Mirand, will be tomorrow's stars.

Home and away

EMBASSY staff are leading the way in organising support for teams playing far from home. Almost 100 Argentine citizens residing and working in Egypt will be attending their team's first match against the title holders, Ghana, complete with their blue-and-white flags and strips. But Ghana too has its fans who study and work here in Egypt: many of them have already made the trip to Port Said, beating drums and clad in traditional dress, to watch their team train. Oman, for their part, have brought 300 supporters with them, so that they will not feel too homesick in Alexandria. The New Zealand team, though, will have to be more self-reliant: only 17 of their compatriots were brave enough to travel half way across the world in order to cheer them on!

Designs on goal

WHILE other teams sample the local culinary delights, the Bahraini team have been caught up in shopping mania. Thanks to them, Port Said is living up to its reputation as a free trade zone. The players have been allocated 100 pounds "pocket money" a day, and spend *all their spare time shopping. On one day,* players and coaches together are said to have spent 12,000 pounds on clothes. Perhaps they have given up any hope of winning the cup, and are concentrating on the special jury prize for the best-dressed team?

Eat up and shut up

THE COACHES of Ghana and Brazil have been trading compliments. E. K. Afrianie has responded to Carlos Cesar's *accusation that the Ghanaian* players look rather older than their supposed 17 years. Rubbish, says Afrianie who, to push his point home, has given the *Weekly* a photo of the team aged 15, before they entered the Football Academy. It was through intensive training, and good nutrition of a kind they rarely *got at home*, says the coach, that he has built them up into such fine *figures of men.* "If Cesar wants his team to be as strong as our African team, he must do the same as I've done".

Cheap at the price

TICKETS for all matches will be available at the stadiums, and from kiosks located in front of the stadiums and in the main squares of the different towns. Prices are *LE1, 5 and 10. For those* who can't get out to enjoy the splendid weather as well as a good game, the matches are being televised on both channels 1 and 2.

English 1, Egypt nil

AT THE International Press Conference held by Samir Zaher, President of the Egyptian Football Association, and the board of the *Organising Committee* of the U-17 World Cup last week, attention seemed to be focused *exclusively on* the foreigners present, whether members of FIFA or the press. When Egyptian reporters and photographers raised the question of the facilities that would be available to them, the organisers seemed to deny that this was part of their responsibilities. This attitude was confirmed by the fact *that the press book* distributed at the conference was only available in English. When *reporters complained* and asked for an Arabic version, the organisers retorted brusquely that they *could easily* get it translated if they couldn't read English. It would seem that they are so concerned with promoting Egypt's image abroad, that they are no longer interested in communicating with their own people. Yet what image can we hope to give to others, as long as we treat each other with such contempt?

Straight talk

AT THE same press conference last week, *most of* the speakers seemed to assume that Egyptian football in general, and the World *Championship* in particular, were perfectly organised and free of any errors and mistakes. The one *exception to this* rule was Sahar El-Hawari, President of the Public Relations Committee. She asked *those present* to bear in mind that her committee relied heavily on the good will of student volunteers. These youngsters are not trained professionals, but are learning on the job. She asked the press, the *other organisers* and the public to bear with their inevitable mistakes and not to judge them too harshly. *This frankness* made a welcome change from the dominant tone of self-satisfaction, *and* was much appreciated by the audience.

Teenage tournament to remember

FIFA President Joao Havelange is proud of the continuing success of the under-17 football tournament, *while Secretary- General Joseph* Blatter hopes the tournament opening today will be an event to remember.

Joao Havelange, president of FIFA (the international football federation), knows only too well *that during every junior world cup* competition emotions run high. And with each tournament, the nostalgic memories of past games, which date back to the first tournament held in China 12 years ago, are consolidated.

For 77-year-old Havelange these emotions are further heightened by the knowledge that this will be the last FIFA youth tournament that he attends as president.

"This realisation brings a mixture *of melancholy and pride. While the* melancholy is inevitable, the pride is the greater sentiment as it comes from the knowledge that a promise to the teenage footballers of the world has been kept, and from the satisfaction of having introduced a *tournament which has totally served* its purpose," he said.

He added that the satisfaction is all the greater because the under-17 event has enabled outstanding young individual players, and emerging football nations, to make their early mark on the international football scene.

"I am sure that this year's FIFA Under-17 World Championship will also bring satisfaction to all those who attend the matches in the *four different venues — Cairo,* Alexandria, Ismailia, and Port Said — and I most warmly thank the organisers within the Egyptian Football Association for all their effort to ensure the success of the event," Havelange concluded.

FIFA *Secretary-General Joseph* Blatter said that when the FIFA Committee for Security and Fair Play decided last year to hold the first ever FIFA World Fair Play *Day in 1997,* the selection of the precise date was not difficult.

"The Fair Play Day was designated to coincide with the final of the FIFA Under-17 World Championship for the JVC Cup in Cairo, thus emphasising the sense of sportsmanship that this tournament always *engenders," he explained*

"That spirit was in evidence already at the inaugural tournament in China in 1985, and has remained one of its most prominent features ever since. We are sure that Fair Play will be recognised and re*spected by all the teams taking part* in the 32 matches here in Egypt," he added

Blatter believes the under-17 championship is the most enjoyable *of all football tournaments. For him* teenage football has many attractive features: a certain simplicity which the senior professional game seems sometimes to have lost, technical prowess, boundless energy, a willingness to learn and a determination to win and claim a *first world medal at the outset of a* promising career.

"No doubt we shall be witnessing these characteristics here in Egypt. But the teams and their young players should not forget the wider educational value of a tournament such as this. *To participate on a* world stage, in such a unique historic setting as Egypt, is educational in itself," Blatter said.

Finally, the secretary-general added that he was sure that the Egyptian Football Association and its organising committee would ensure that all participants and guests have a tournament to remember.

Tut stirs copyright row

A young artist and a *businessmen* are locked in a legal and press battle over who has the copyright to the logo of the Under-17 World Cup Championship, which opens in Egypt today.

Mohamed Taaeb, a teacher at the Faculty of Fine Arts, *claims that he* designed the character Tut, a youngster in Pharaonic gear shown in the logo kicking a football, and that he still has the copyright to the design. Engineer *Sherine Youssry*, who owns a design and trading company in Zamalek, claims that he bought the logo copyright from Taaeb for 20,000 pounds.

The story began two years ago, when Youssry hired Taaeb to illustrate a sports publication in anticipation of the junior World Cup. Taaeb came up with the character Tut for a series of illustrations that proved popular among kids. Taaeb says that Youssry *promised him a* payment of LE50,000 for his drawings if they are bought by ISL worldwide, the company marketing the championship. Fearing that Youssry *may renege on the promise.* Taaeb copyrighted his drawings. Later on, Youssry, having reached a deal with the ISL on using the Tut character for the logo, laid a rival copyright *claim.* This is where things get messy.

Taaeb told journalists that Youssry hired thugs to force him to sign a document surrendering his copyright of the drawings. He has already filed a lawsuit against Youssry and even threatened a hunger strike when the Egyptian Football Federation showed little interest in his claims. Youssry denies the use of coercion and says he bought the *copyright.*

Just to complicate matters further, the two men produced rival interpretations of the junior football mascot. Taaeb says that Tut is just the average *Pharaonic* kid. "I did not invent this character to become the *mascot* of the under-17 World Cup. I drew this boy and called him Tut for children stories. I wrote a story about Tut and his friends fighting for the ball," said Taaeb who also *works for the children magazine Aladdin*, an Al-Ahram publication. Youssry, however, maintains that Tut stands for the Pharaonic King Tutankhamun who died at the age of *17. "I have produced this mascot for* the World Cup as I have produced a number of mascots for past events — such as Horus, the mascot of the 5th African Tournament held in Cai*ro in 1991.* At that time, *I showed* this Tut to President Hosni Mubarak and he was very pleased with it," Youssry remarked.

Taaeb says that when he approached Samir Zaher, head of the Egyptian Football Federation, with *his complaint, the latter said,* "The federation has nothing to do with this quarrel or with the mascot." Taaeb has sent a fax to the FIFA and ISL Worldwide, and asked them to *back his claims. Meanwhile, an* innocent-looking, unsuspecting Tut is getting printed on T-shirts, soft drink cans, and other championship memorabilia.

Twelve years of tomorrow's champions

The Junior World Championships began life as a biennial competition for under-16s in *1985. It was only in 1991 that the decision* was taken to raise the age limit to under-17. In both of these two periods in the history of the tournament, it is Africa that has taken the lion's share of the prizes, thanks to the two top-ranking youth teams in the world, Nigeria and Ghana. Nigeria have won the competition twice, in 1985 and 1993, and were runners-up in 1987. Ghana have also taken two titles, in *1991 and 1995, and were runners-up in 1993.* The other continent that has dominated the championship over the years is Latin America, with Brazil and Argentina, which are ranked respectively third and fourth in the world. Yet neither country has ever won the title: Brazil's best result was second place in 1995, while Argentina has come *no closer* than third, in 1991 and again in 1995.

Other continents *have not fared so well.* Asia and Europe have produced only one *championship* winner each in the last 12 years: Saudi Arabia (1989) and the former Soviet Union (1987). North America has still to produce a single succesful challenger.

This may seem like a serious imbalance. But we should remember that the U-17 World Championship was established in order to redress a *similar predominance* of a few favoured nations in the senior game. The idea emerged during the elections to the board of FIFA held on the occasion of the 1974 World *Cup in Germany. One of the candidates. Dr* Joao Havilange, told the association that: "Competitive football at a world level has been confined to only four countries: Brazil and Argentina from South America, and Germany and Italy from Europe. None of the other nations of the world stand a chance against any of those four." *He suggested that a World* Championship should be organised for juniors. *In this way, when they graduate to senior* level, they would already have some experience of the international game, and this might help break the monopoly of the chosen few over the top prizes. Ibrahim El-Gweini, one of the organisers of this year's championship, thinks that Havilange has been proved right — above all by the emergence of African football: "This theory worked for the *Nigerian team, who won the junior title twice,* and then went on as seniors to take the gold medal at the Atlanta Olympics in 1996." Indeed, no less a figure than Pele has upped Nigeria to win the next World Cup in France in 1998. According to El-Gweini, it is up to Egypt to follow Nigeria's example. Not only has our U-17 team inspired *great hope in the* fans, but the U-20 team shows great promise, as does the newly formed U-15 team which is being coached by one of our best trainers, Ibrahim Youssef. So perhaps El-Gweini's optimism will yet be justified.

Egypt had originally wanted to host the 1995 U-17 World Championship, but it was decided that it would be better to wait until 1997, so that there would be time to prepare the venues and facilities that would be required in all four cities involved.

Egyptian fans have long dreamed that one day *the World Cup itself would* come to Egypt, but officials from the Egyptian Football Federation have had to tell them that this *is quite impossible.* No country can pretend to this honour unless it has not just four, but eight cities, all capable of housing not only the teams with their extensive entourages and the journalists that follow them around, but also the many thousands of fans which the biggest teams, such as Brazil or Argentina, take with them wherever they go.

*Edited by **Inas Mazhar**, reported by **Nashwa Abdel-Tawab**, **Abeer Anwar**, **Eman Abdel-Moeti**, and **Dalia El-Hennawy***







photos: Hossam Diab



Nour El-Sherif:

Social study

He still prefers Omar Ibn Abdel-Aziz to Haroun Al-Rashid. After all, he will settle only for equal opportunities

The meeting place is the swimming pool of a five-star hotel, conjuring up the picture of an athletic star who will want to be interviewed in between laps. Will be doing sit-ups as well?

Nour El-Sherif is sitting in his air-conditioned bungalow, fully — albeit casually — clothed, in white slacks, a loose yellow shirt and soft slippers, listening to New Age music. There are no weights in sight and none of the amateur athlete's usual appendices. Books, magazines and newspapers are stacked on a table in the corner. This tiny room is his refuge. This is where he comes to relax, read, think and read scenarios. He practiced yoga and meditation for a long time, but stopped when he felt he was becoming too involved. He still enjoys the music, though, and likes sitting near the pool, surrounded by greenery. He comes here when he seeks instant insulation from his usual surroundings, a quick and easy way of cutting himself off for a few hours, before resuming his busy schedule.

It is therefore neither the exercise nor the sun that bring him here. His complexion is actually rather pale. For *El-Masir* (Destiny), his latest film, directed by Youssef Chahine, which eventually took him to the Cannes Film Festival, he used a special foundation to appear darker than he really is. Acquiring a natural tan for that weathered look was out of the question. The sun gives him allergies.

One of the most popular actors in Egyptian cinema, Nour El-Sherif is the recipient of numerous awards, but can also boast a mention in the 1997 *Larousse* dictionary. He singularly lacks the arrogance one has come to associate with stardom, however. It would not be inaccurate to describe him as rather shy and modest, unconcerned with the fact that he is recognised and gawked at wherever he goes. He displays none of the idiosyncrasies of the rich and famous.

Though he has played leading parts in 157 films, 15 plays and 17 TV serials, as per his official CV, he is only interested in the parts which taught him something new. "Acting is a serious business, one has to be learning constantly," he says. "I would never accept a role if I don't feel and deeply understand the character I am playing. Unless I can identify with him, I know it is not going to be any good." He has sometimes appeared in roles where he expressed ideas totally opposed to his own, but in those cases, the film as a whole carried a message with which he was in full agreement — playing the character of a rich landowner, for instance, "when I am, and always have been, a staunch Nasserist." He would definitely enjoy the part, provided the landowner is pictured unequivocally as the bad guy, he says.

Nour El-Sherif was orphaned very young and brought up in his uncles' house in Sayeda Zeinab. He still remembers growing up in this part of the city, where there were four cinemas on his street as well as two open-air cinemas on the corner, each one showing a different movie, as one of the happiest times of his life. "In summer, I was able to see six different movies every week." His cousin initiated him early to the fascination of cinema. When he graduated from secondary school and enrolled in the Higher Institute for Arts, however, he directed his interests mainly towards theatre. Graduating from the institute in 1967, he worked there as an assistant director for many years, then moved to the National Theatre. After a few false starts, he was catapulted to fame with one of the greatest TV successes to date, the serial *El-Qahira wel-Nass* (Cairo and People). Suddenly, all over Egypt, everyone knew his name, recognised his face.

Nour El-Sherif enjoyed the popularity, not so much for its own sake as for the fact that it helped him reach out, he felt. Actually, "people" have always been his other major preoccupation. An actor, he strongly believes, has a social duty to perform. He is readily, and eloquently, involved in a political discussion. "Nasser brought partial solutions, like low-income housing, free education, readily affordable cultural venues, the summer youth camps where school students could learn new skills, but obviously it was not enough and many of these policies were not properly followed through," he says. "There is nothing to stimulate young people these days. The present as well as the future are bleak."

He remembers a particular summer camp for young actors that he attended while still in secondary school. Well-known directors and actors came to talk to the youngsters, firing Nour's imagination and desire to excel in his profession. He wishes he could do the same for young actors-in-the-making, now that he knows something about acting, but these camps no longer exist. He worries constantly about young people, about women in particular, the kind of future that awaits them. For women, he firmly believes, it is absolutely essential to marry and raise children. What can they do now, when no one can afford to start a family before the age of 30 or even 35? Women, according to him, are the principal victims of the past half-century's changes. He is not against working women of course: his own wife, actress Pussy, whom he met during the shooting of *El-Qahira wel-Nass*, is also his business partner (they own a production company), while Sarah, his eldest daughter, will be graduating soon from the American University in Cairo's Department of Theatre, Music, Art and Film. "She is going to be a talented director," he says proudly of his daughter. Nevertheless, he insists, creating a family is more important than professional successes. Besides, why not have both?

Though Nour El-Sherif did not come from an affluent family, he was allowed to choose his career, develop his talents, marry the woman he loved and bring up his children properly. How many, with the same background, would have the same opportunities today? No matter what topic is being discussed, El-Sherif's line of thinking never strays far from his pet subject: the need for more social justice.

He has had many dreams, but not always the time to pursue them. Once, just before graduation, he had planned to tour Egypt after receiving his diploma, in order to study and record all the dialects, verbal idiosyncrasies, idioms, traditions and local customs of the countryside, creating a sort of database for use by actors and directors, providing them with accurate models to improve their interpretations. Before he could act on his idea, however, he got the part in *El-Qahira wel-Nass* and became one of the most sought-after young actors of his generation, almost overnight. There was no longer time for a long, leisurely tour of the governorates. Naguib Mahfouz's *Qasr El-Shawq* (Palace of Desire), directed by the late Hassan El-Imam, followed, in which he played the character of Kamal Abdel-Gawwad. From then on, he seems never to have looked back, dividing himself between the cinema, television and the theatre.

His preferences go towards political and historical roles and he is in favour of strong messages. He does not say it — maybe because he believes it goes without saying — but the message must be one which emphasises social justice and the need for citizens to lead an honourable, decent life. He favourite part ever is that of Caliph Omar Ibn Abdel-Aziz, "because," he says, "he brought social justice to his empire in less than thirty years. I find him a great deal more interesting than Haroun Al-Rashid, for instance." He is a undoubtedly a serious actor with serious concerns, but watching his sensitive face and the smile lurking in his eyes, one is led to wonder why he never chose comedy to put his message across. He does love comedy, he says, but finding funny scripts is no easy task, and a bad comedy can really destroy the best of actors.

Nour El-Sherif would like to see cinemas spring up on every street and in every village in the country. "Cinemas force people out of their houses. Going to the cinema represents a sort of social intercourse as opposed to television, which locks the family up, physically and mentally, in a confined space, a restricted environment, a passive sort of entertainment. Going out to see a film is a different experience altogether." He wants more Egyptian films produced with Egyptian capital, too — since those who provide the capital dictate the conditions of production. With more films and more cinemas, the price of tickets would go down and the number of spectators would go up; it is as simple as that, he insists. Unlike cinema, theatre is expensive and, under the present circumstances, it would be unrealistic to hope that people from all walks of life could be able and/or willing to afford evenings at the theatre. Good films, however, can offer an excellent substitute. He also wants directors and producers to tap historical sources for inspiration in order to familiarise young people with their past. The past provides us with invaluable lessons and a sense of belonging, says Nour El-Sherif, "but we still don't know how to produce good historical films. We use all that heavy, old-fashioned makeup and the dialogues are written in a way that completely alienates those whom it is our duty to attract. And why can't the protagonists speak colloquial Arabic?" he demands, warming to the subject. "After all, even in the old days, I can't imagine people in the street addressing each other in classical Arabic. Many people who have problems with the classical idiom, especially the very young, lose interest." El-Sherif lights a cigarette, then promptly forgets about it: "The sign of a good actor," he emphasises, "is that he does not appear to be acting... he has to be the character, to fully live the part. I was Ibn Rushd for the duration [of *El-Masir*]." In *El-Sarkha* (The Scream), directed by Mohamed El-Naggar, he played the role of a deaf-mute. Six months before the shooting, he began learning sign language.

In the next few months, a new experience is awaiting Nour El-Sherif, who is making his debut as director in "Wedad's Wedding Night" (*Dukhlet Wedad*). The scenario is written by his friend Mohamed Helmi Helal, and his wife Pussy will have the leading role. "Of course, I will not be acting in the film," he says, then smiles: "well, maybe I will put in a cameo appearance."

Profile by ***Fayza Hassan***

Pack of Cards

by Madame Sosostris

♥ **Hisham El-Khateeb**, a special friend of *Al-Ahram Weekly*, surrendered to conjugal bliss with his sweetheart **Fatma Mahmoud**. The bride, a diminutive belle, is the daughter of **Mahmoud Saleh Selim**, a flight engineer with Egypt Air, while **Hisham** is a special operations officer at Cairo International Airport. **Tuta and Mishmish**, as the bride and groom are popularly known, celebrated their wedding at Shepheard's Hotel, where they literally danced the night away.





(l-r) The ambassador of India and Mursi Saad El-Din; Fatma and Hisham (El-Khateeb); Reem and Hisham (Rashid)

And they were not the only ones to do so, I can tell you! On the other side of town, another **Hisham (Rashid)** was leading another diminutive belle onto the dance floor: our own **Reem Leila**. The couple celebrated their wedding at the Pyramids Movenpick Hotel.

♠ I had so much wedding cake, what with all the **Hishams** tying knots, that I was only too happy to dip a dainty fork into the succulent curry served at the Indian Embassy, where 50 years of independance were being celebrated with great pomp. But dear oh dear, the curry was so hot — just as it should be — that I must confess my mascara melted at once, and it is through abundant lacrimal liquid that I perceived my dear **Mursi Saad El-Din** sporting a garland of white flowers and chatting amiably with the guests. Coming to think of it, I was so overwhelmed by the curry that I may have had visions. Maybe **Mursi** wasn't there at all!